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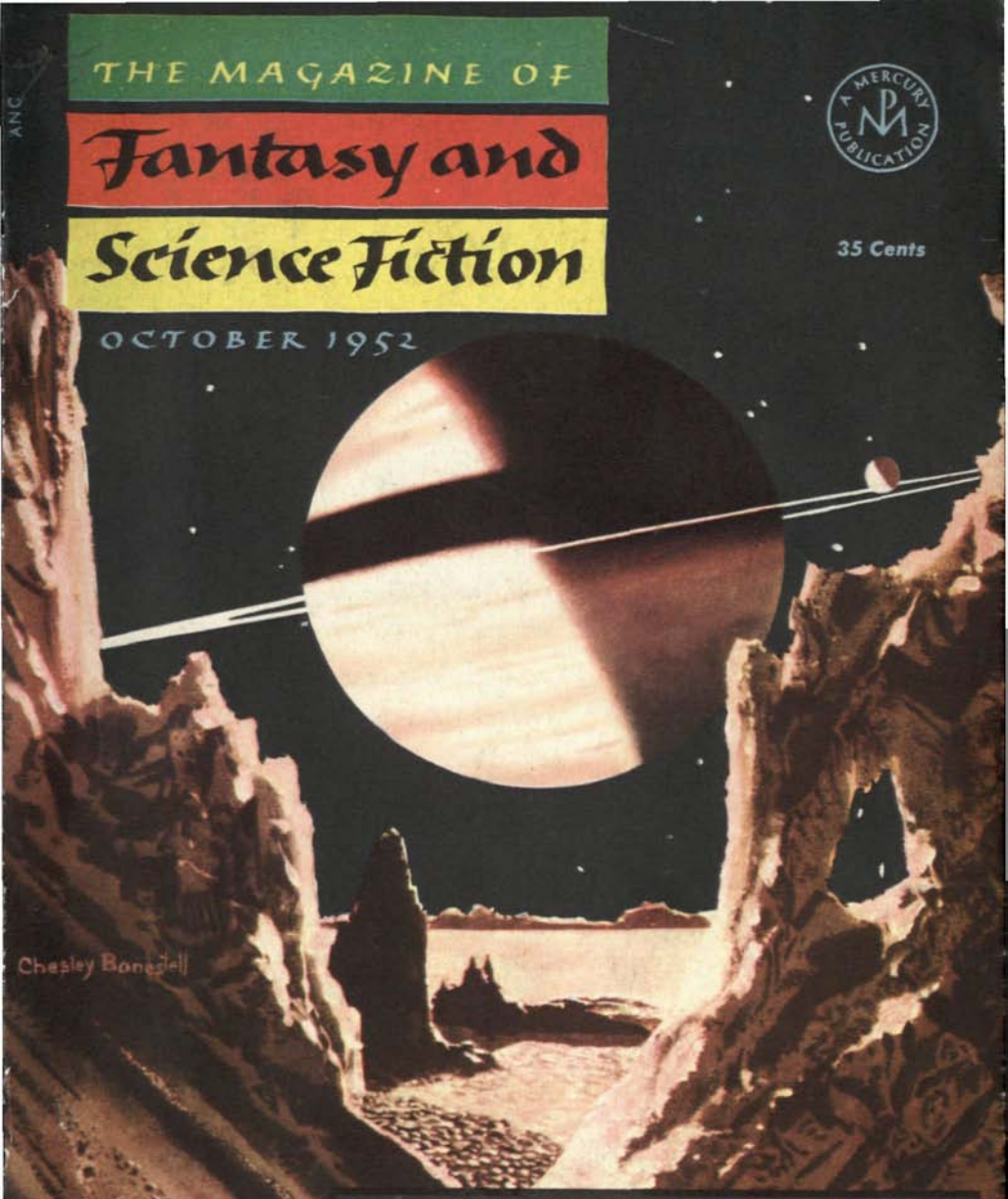

An Egg a Month from All Over — IDRIS SEABRIGHT
The Darker Drink — LESLIE CHARTERIS
Unpleasantness at Bludleigh Court — P. G. WODEHOUSE

also L. SPRAGUE de CAMP & FLETCHER PRATT, ANTHONY BOUCHER

The best stories of fantasy and science fiction, new and old

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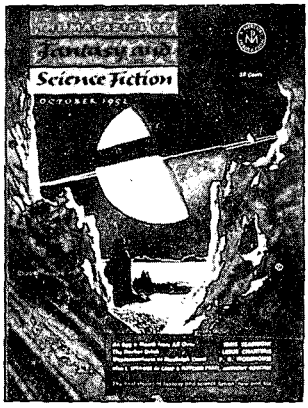
NEW COVER SERIES



We are delighted to report that this month's cover is the first of a new series of paintings done especially for F & SF by Chesley Bonestell. It is hardly necessary, we feel, to introduce Mr. Bonestell here—his incomparable artistry is surely well known to the majority of our readers. Mr. Bonestell's capacity for being at once scientifically precise and artistically inventive is a natural development of his background and training. His early work as an architect, his profound interest in higher mathematics and astronomy, his experience in Hollywood (he was technical advisor for "Destination Moon" and "When Worlds Collide") contribute to his unique skill. The four paintings now in our office demonstrate the high degree of realism and drama Mr. Bonestell is capable of achieving. The views of Jupiter, Mars, the Moon and Saturn (the last is reproduced on this month's cover) are, we feel, some of the finest examples of science fiction art that we have seen.

We are sure that you will enjoy these paintings as much as we do. At this writing, we don't know just how many more there will be—but you might help us return Mr. Bonestell to his easel by letting us have your opinions and perhaps some suggestions for future covers. We look forward to hearing from you.

THE EDITORS

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

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Cover by Chesley Bonestell
(Saturn, as seen from Dione)

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COMING . . . IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF

One of the great "ifs" of history — and a favorite topic for science fiction writers who specialize in alternate-universe themes — concerns itself with the kind of North America that might have developed if the Confederacy had won the Civil War. *Bring the Jubilee*, a fine tale of time travel by Ward Moore (so well remembered for his brilliant fantasy-satire, *Greener Than You Think*) visualizes with keen perceptiveness our hemisphere as it might have developed if Gettysburg had had a different resolution. A complete, full-length novel.

The old master of space travel and its meaning, Ray Bradbury, demonstrates that the problem of the frontier will always be the same — whether it be 1949 or 2003 — in a new episode of the Martian Chronicles, *The Wilderness*.

Hard on the heels of these veterans comes the younger generation: Philip K. Dick, in *The Little Movement*, shows that an alien invasion might well choose as its initial point of attack — the nursery. And Evelyn E. Smith, star of that wittiest of all amateur science-fantasy publications, the Irish *Slant*, makes her professional debut with a study in logical absurdity, *The Martian and the Magician*.

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Every science fiction enthusiast remembers the thrill of his first exposure to the concept of space travel — the glory of man's voyaging between the planets and even between the stars. But modern adult science fiction has largely grown away from the mechanics of space travel itself; the voyage is taken for granted as part of the background, and the story is focused on the results. Here, however, one of the brighter new authors in the field shows that the story of the space ship is not exhausted; inevitably in that remote interstellar future, there will be the Mapping Command, whose duties are never finished and whose voyages of discovery may be as exciting as that of Magellan — and as perilous.

Grenville's Planet

by MICHAEL SHAARA

WISHER did not see the brightness because he was back aft alone. In the still ship he sat quietly, relaxed. He was not bored. It was just that he had no interest. After fourteen years in the Mapping Command even the strangest of new worlds was routine to him and what little imagination he had was beginning to center upon a small farm he had seen on the southern plains of Vega VII.

The brightness that Wisher did not see grew with the passing moments. A pale young man named Grenville, who was Wisher's crewman, watched it for a long while absently. When the gleam took on brilliance and a blue-white, dazzling blaze Grenville was startled. He stared at the screen for a long moment, then carefully checked the distance. Still a few light minutes away, the planet was already uncommonly bright.

Pleasantly excited, Grenville watched the planet grow. Slowly the moons came out. Four winked on and ringed the bright world like pearls in a vast necklace. Grenville gazed in awe. The blueness and the brightness flowed in together; it was the most beautiful thing that Grenville had ever seen.

Excited, he buzzed for Wisher. Wisher did not come.

Grenville took the ship in close and now it occurred to him to wonder. The glare was incredible. That a planet should shine like that, like an enormous facet of polished glass, was incredible. Now, as he watched, the light began to form vaguely into the folds of clouds. The blue grew richer

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and deeper. Long before he hit the first cloud layer, Grenville knew what it was. He pounded the buzzer. Wisher finally came.

When he saw the water in the screen he stopped in his tracks.

"Well I'll be damned!" he breathed.

Except for a few scuds of clouds it was blue. The entire world was blue. There was the white of the clouds and the icecaps, but the rest was all blue and the rest was water.

Grenville began to grin. A world of *water!*

"Now how's *that* for a freak?" he chuckled. "One in a million, right, Sam? I bet you never saw anything like that."

Wisher shook his head, still staring. Then he moved quickly to the controls and set out to make a check. They circled the planet with the slow, spiralling motion of the Mapping Command, bouncing radar off the dark side. When they came back into the daylight they were sure. There was no land on the planet.

Grenville, as usual, began to chatter.

"Well, naturally," he said, "it was bound to happen sooner or later. Considering Earth, which has a land area covering only one fourth —"

"Yep," nodded Wisher.

"— and when you consider the odds, chances are that there are quite a number of planets with scarcely any land area at all."

Wisher had moved back to the screen.

"Let's go down," he said.

Grenville, startled, stared at him.

"Where?"

"Down low. I want to see what's living in that ocean."

Because each new world was a wholly *new* world and because experience therefore meant nothing, Wisher had decided a long while ago to follow the regs without question. For without the regs, the Mapping Command was a death trap. Nowhere in space was the need for rules so great as out on the frontier where there were no rules at all. The regs were complex, efficient and all-embracing; it was to the regs that the men of the Mapping Command owed their lives and the rest of Mankind owed the conquest of space.

But inevitably, unalterably, there were things which the regs could not have foreseen. And Wisher knew that too, but he did not think about it.

According to plan, then, they dropped down into the stratosphere, went further down below the main cloud region and levelled off at a thousand feet. Below them, mile after rolling, billowy mile, the sea flowed out to the great bare circle of the horizon.

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With the screen at full magnification, they probed the water.

It was surprising, in all that expanse of sea, to observe so little. No schools of fish of any kind, no floating masses of seaweed, nothing but a small fleet shape here and there and an occasional group of tiny plant organisms.

Wisher dropped only a hundred or so feet lower. In a world where evolution had been confined underwater it would be best to keep at a distance. On the other worlds to which he had come Wisher had seen some vast and incredible things. Eight hundred feet up, he thought, is a good safe distance.

It was from that height then, that they saw the island.

It was small, too small to be seen from a distance, was barely five miles in length and less than two miles wide. A little brown cigar it was, sitting alone in the varying green-blue wash of the ocean.

Grenville began to grin. Abruptly he laughed out loud. Grenville was not the kind of man who is easily awed, and the sight of that one bare speck, that single stubby persistent butt of rock alone in a world of water, was infinitely comical to him.

"Wait'll we show the boys *this*," he chuckled to Wisher. "Break out the camera. My God, what a picture *this* will make!"

Grenville was filled with pride. This planet, after all, was *his* assignment. It was his to report on, his discovery — he gasped. They might even name it after *him*.

He flushed, his heart beat rapidly. It had happened before. There were a number of odd planets named after men in the Mapping Command. When the tourists came they would be coming to Grenville's Planet, one of the most spectacular wonders of the Universe.

While the young man was thus rejoicing, Wisher had brought the ship around and was swinging slowly in over the island. It was covered with some kind of brownish-green, stringy vegetation. Wisher was tempted to go down and check for animal life, but decided to see first if there were any more islands.

Still at a height of 800 feet, they spiralled the planet. They did not see the second island, radar picked it out for them.

This one was bigger than the first and there was another island quite near to the south. Both were narrow and elongated in the cigar-like shape of the first, were perhaps twenty miles in length and were encrusted with the same brown-green vegetation. They were small enough to have been hidden from sight during the first check by a few scattered clouds.

The discovery of them was anticlimactic and disappointing. Grenville would have been happier if there was no land at all. But he regained some of his earlier enthusiasm when he remembered that the tourists would still come and that now at least they would be able to land.

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There was nothing at all on the night side. Coming back out into the daylight, Wisher cautiously decided to land.

"Peculiar," said Wisher, peering at the dunes of the beach.

"What is?" Grenville eyed him through the fish bowls of their helmets.

"I don't know." Wisher turned slowly, gazed around at the shaggy, weedy vegetation. "It doesn't feel right."

Grenville fell silent. There was nothing on the island that could hurt them, they were quite sure of that. The check had revealed the presence of a great number of small, four-footed animals, but only one type was larger than a dog, and that one was slow and noisy.

"Have to be careful about snakes," Wisher said absently, recalling the regs on snakes and insects. Funny thing, that. There were very few insects.

Both men were standing in close to the ship. It was the rule, of course. You never left the ship until you were absolutely sure. Wisher, for some vague reason he could not define, was not sure.

"How's the air check?"

Grenville was just then reading the meters. After a moment he said:

"Good."

Wisher relaxed, threw open his helmet and breathed in deeply. The clean fresh air flowed into him, exhilarating. He unscrewed his helmet entirely, looking around.

The ship had come down on the up end of the beach, a good distance from the sea, and was standing now in a soft, reddish sand. It was bordered on the north by the open sea and to the south was the scrawny growth they had seen from above. It was not a jungle — the plants were too straight and stiff for that — and the height of the tallest was less than ten feet. But it was the very straightness of the things, the eerie regularity of them, which grated in Wisher's mind.

But, breathing in the cool sea air of the island, Wisher began to feel more confident. They had their rifles, they had the ship and the alarm system. There was nothing here that could harm them.

Grenville brought out some folding chairs from the ship. They sat and chatted pleasantly until the twilight came.

Just before twilight two of the moons came out.

"Moons," said Wisher suddenly.

"What?"

"I was just thinking," Wisher explained.

"What about the moons?"

"I wasn't thinking exactly about them, I was thinking about the tide. Four good-sized moons in conjunction could raise one heck of a tide."

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Grenville settled back, closing his eyes.

"So?"

"So that's probably where the land went."

Grenville was too busy dreaming about his fame as discoverer of Grenville's Planet to be concerned with tides and moons.

"Let the techs worry about that," he said without interest.

But Wisher kept thinking.

The tide could very well be the cause. When the four moons got together and started to pull they would raise a tremendous mass of water, a grinding power that would slice away the continent edges like no erosive force in history. Given a billion years in which to work — but Wisher suddenly remembered a peculiar thing about the island.

If tides had planed down the continents of this planet, then these islands had no right being here, certainly not as sand and loose rock. Just one tide like the ones those moons could raise would be enough to cut the islands completely away. Well maybe, he thought, the tides are very far apart, centuries even.

He glanced apprehensively at the sky. The two moons visible were reassuringly far apart.

He turned from the moons to gaze at the sea. And then he remembered the first thought he had had about this planet — that uncomfortable feeling that the first sight of land had dispelled. He thought of it now again.

Evolution.

A billion years beneath the sea, with no land to take the first developing mammals. What was going on, right now as he watched, beneath the placid rolling surface of the sea?

It was a disturbing thought. When they went back to the ship for the night Wisher did not need the regs to tell him to seal the airlock and set the alarm screens.

The alarm that came in the middle of the night and nearly scared Wisher to death turned out to be only an animal. It was one of the large ones, a weird, bristling thing with a lean and powerful body. It got away before they were up to see it, but it left its photographic image.

In spite of himself, Wisher had trouble getting back to sleep, and in the morning was silently in favor of leaving for the one last star they would map before returning to base. But the regs called for life specimens to be brought back from all livable worlds whenever possible, whenever there was no "slight manifestation of danger." Well, here it was certainly possible. They would have to stay long enough to take a quick sampling of plants and animals and of marine life too.

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Grenville was just as anxious to get back as Wisher was, but for different reasons. Grenville, figured Grenville, was now a famous man.

Early in the morning, then, they lifted ship and once more spiralled the planet. Once the mapping radar had recorded the size and shape and location of the islands, they went in low again and made a complete check for life forms.

They found, as before, very little. There were the bristling things, and — as Wisher had suspected — a great quantity of snakes and lizards. There were very few observable fish. There were no birds.

When they were done they returned to the original island. Grenville, by this time, had a name for it. Since there was another island near it, lying to the south, Grenville called that one South Grenville. The first was, of course, North Grenville. Grenville chuckled over that for a long while.

"Don't go too near the water."

"All right, mama," Grenville chirped, grinning. "I'll work the edge of the vegetation."

"Leave the rifle, take the pistol. It's handier."

Grenville nodded and left, dragging the specimen sack. Wisher, muttering, turned toward the water.

It is unnatural, he thought, for a vast warm ocean to be so empty of life. Because the ocean, really, is where life begins. He had visions in his mind of any number of vicious, incredible, slimy things that were alive and native to that sea, and who were responsible for the unnatural sterility of the water. When he approached the waves he was very cautious.

The first thing he noticed, with a shock, was that there were no shellfish.

Not any. Not crabs or snails or even the tiniest of sea beings. Nothing. The beach was a bare, dead plot of sand.

He stood a few yards from the waves, motionless. He was almost positive, now, that there was danger here. The shores of every warm sea he had ever seen, from Earth on out to Deneb, had been absolutely choked with life and the remnants of life. There were always shells and fish scales, and snails, worms, insects; bits of jellyfish, tentacles, minutiae of a hundred million kinds, cluttering and crowding every square inch of the beach and the sea. And yet here, now, there was nothing. Just sand and water.

It took a great deal of courage for Wisher to approach those waves, although the water here was shallow. He took a quick water sample and hurried back to the ship.

Minutes later he was perched in the shadow of her side, staring out broodingly over the ocean. The water was Earth-water as far as his instruments could tell. There was nothing wrong with it. But there was nothing much living in it.

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When Grenville came back with the floral specimens Wisher quietly mentioned the lack of shellfish.

"Well, hell," said Grenville, scratching his head painfully, "maybe they just don't like it here."

And maybe they've got reason, Wisher said to himself. But aloud he said: "The computer finished constructing the orbits of those moons."

"So?"

"So the moons conjunct every 112 years. They raise a tide of 600 feet."

Grenville did not follow.

"The tide," said Wisher, smiling queerly, "is at least 400 feet higher than any of the islands."

When Grenville stared, still puzzled, Wisher grunted and kicked at the sand.

"Now where in hell do you suppose the animals came from?"

"They should be drowned," said Grenville slowly.

"Right. And would be, unless they're amphibian, which they're not. Or unless a new batch evolves every hundred years."

"Um." Grenville sat down to think about it.

"Don't make sense," he said after a while.

Having thoroughly confounded Grenville, Wisher turned away and paced slowly in the sand. The sand, he thought distractedly, that's another thing. Why in heck is this island here at all?

Artificial.

The word popped unbidden into his brain.

That would be it. That would have to be it.

The island was artificial, was — restored. Put here by whoever or whatever lived under the sea.

Grenville was ready to go. He stood nervously eyeing the waves, his fingers clamped tightly on the pistol at his belt, waiting for Wisher to give the word.

Wisher leaned against the spaceship, conveniently near the airlock. He regretted disturbing Grenville.

"We can't leave yet," he said calmly. "We haven't any proof. And besides, there hasn't been any 'manifestation of danger.' "

"We have proof enough for me," Grenville said quickly.

Wisher nodded absently.

"It's easy to understand. Evolution kept right on going, adapting and changing just as it does everywhere else in the Universe. Only here, when the mammals began coming up onto the land, they had no room to expand. And they were all being washed away every hundred years, as the tides rose and fell and the continents wore down below tide level.

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"But evolution never stopped. It continued beneath the sea. Eventually it came up with an intelligent race.

"God knows what they are, or how far they've progressed. They must be pretty highly-evolved, or they couldn't have done something like this" — he broke off, realizing that the building of the islands was no clue. The ancient Egyptians on Earth had built the pyramids, certainly a much harder job. There was no way of telling how far evolved this race was. Or what the island was for.

Zoo?

No. He shook that out of the confusion of his mind. If the things in the sea wanted a zoo they would naturally build it below the surface of the water, where they themselves could travel with ease and where the animals could be kept in airtight compartments. And if this was a zoo, then by now there should have been visitors.

That was one more perplexing thing. Why had nothing come? It was unbelievable that an island like this should be left completely alone, that nothing had noticed the coming of their ship.

And here his thought broke again. They would not be just fish, these things. They would need . . . hands. Or tentacles. He pictured something like a genius squid, and the hair of his body stiffened.

He turned back to Grenville.

"Did you get the animal specimens?"

Grenville shook his head. "No. Just plants. And a small lizard."

Wisher's face, lined with the inbred caution of many years, now at last betrayed his agitation. "We'll have to get one of those things that set off the alarm last night. But to heck with the rest. We'll let HQ worry about that." He stepped quickly into the airlock, dragging the bag of specimens. "I'll pack up," he said, "you go get that thing."

Grenville turned automatically and struck off down the beach.

He never came back.

At the end of the third hour after Grenville had gone, Wisher went to the arms locker and pulled out a heavy rifle. He cursed the fact that he had no small scout sled. He could not take the ship. She was too big and unwieldy for low, slow flying and he could not risk cracking her up.

He was breaking the regs, of course. Since Grenville had not come back he must be considered dead and it was up to Wisher to leave alone. A special force would come back for Grenville, or for what was left of him. Wisher knew all that. He thought about it while he was loading the rifle. He thought about the vow he had made never to break the regs and he went right on loading the rifle. He told himself that he would take no chances

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and if he didn't find Grenville right away he would come back and leave, but he knew all along that he was breaking the regs. At the same time he knew that there was nothing else to do. This was the one reg he had never faced before and it was the one reg he would always break. For Grenville or for anyone else. For a skinny young fool like Grenville, or for anyone else.

Before he left he took the routine precautions concerning the ship. He set the alarm screens to blast anything that moved within two hundred feet of her. If Grenville came back before him it would be all right because the alarm was set to deactivate when it registered the sound pattern of either his or Grenville's voice. If Grenville came back and didn't see him, he would know that the alarm was on.

And if no one came back at all, the ship would blow by itself.

The beach was wide and curved on out of sight. Grenville's deep heel prints were easy to follow.

Stiffly, in the wind, the stalks of the brown vegetation scratched and rustled. Wisher walked along Grenville's track. He wanted to call, but stopped himself. No noise. He must make no noise.

This is the end of it, he kept saying to himself. When I get out of this I will go home.

The heel prints turned abruptly into the alien forest. Wisher walked some distance farther on, to a relatively clear space. He turned, stepping carefully, started to circle the spot where Grenville had gone in. The wood around him was soggy, sterile. He saw nothing move. But a sharp, shattering blast came suddenly to him in the still air.

The explosion blossomed and Wisher jerked spasmodically. The ship. Something was at the ship. He fought down a horrible impulse to run, stood quiet, gun poised, knowing that the ship could take care of itself. And then he stepped slowly forward. And fell.

He fell through a soft light mat of brushes into a hole. There was a crunching snap and he felt metal rip into his legs, tearing and cracking the bones. He went in up to his shoulders. He knew in a flash, with a blast of glacial fear, what it was. *Animal trap.*

He reached for his rifle. But the rifle was beyond him. A foot past his hand, it lay on the floor of the wood near him. His legs, his legs . . . he felt the awful pain as he tried to move.

It blazed through his mind and woke him. Out of his belt he dragged his pistol, and in a sea of pain, held upright by the trap, he waited. He was not afraid. He had broken the regs, and this had happened, and he had expected it. He waited.

Nothing came.

Why, why?

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This had happened to Grenville, he knew. Why?

It had happened to him now, and for a moment he could not understand why he did not seem to care, but was just . . . curious. Then he looked down into the hole and saw the hot redness of his own blood, and as he watched it bubble he realized that he was dying.

He had very little time. He was hopeful. Maybe something would come and at least he would see what they were. He wanted awfully for something to come. In the red mist which was his mind he debated with himself whether or not to shoot it if it came, and over and over he asked himself why, why? Before something came, unfortunately, he died.

The traps had been dug in the night. From out the sea they had come to dig in the preserve — for a preserve was what the island was, was all that it could have been — and then had returned to the sea to wait.

For the ship had been seen from the very beginning, and its purpose understood. The best brains of the sea had gathered and planned, the enormous, manta-like people whose name was unpronounceable but whose technology was not far behind Earth's, met in consultation and immediately understood. It was necessary to capture the ship. Therefore the Earthmen must be separated from it, and it was for this reason that Wisher had died.

But now, to the astonishment of the things, the ship was still alive. It stood silent and alone in the whiteness of the beach, ticking and sparking within itself, and near it, on the bloodied sand, were the remains of the one that had come too close. The others had fled in terror.

Time was of no importance to the clever, squid-like beings. They had won already, could wait and consider. Thus the day grew late and became afternoon, and the waves — the aseptic, sterile waves which were proof in themselves of the greatest of all oceanic civilizations — crumbled whitely on the beach. The things exulted. The conquest of space was in their hands.

Within the ship, of course, there was ticking, and a small red hand moved toward zero.

In a little while the ship would blow, and with it would go the island, and a great chunk of the sea. But the beings could not know. It was an alien fact they faced and an alien fact was unknowable. Just as Wisher could not have known the nature of the planet, these things could not now foresee the nature of the ship and the wheel had come full circle. Second by second, with the utter, mechanical loyalty of the machine, the small red hand crept onward.

The waves near the beach were frothy and white.

A crowd was forming.

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Looking backward and purely personal: In our second quarterly issue, that of Winter-Spring, 1950, we published under the general heading of "Gavagan's Bar" two short chronicles of typical happenings at that wondrous pub "down in Greenwich Village." This unique venture of our favorite writing combine met with wild acclaim from our readers and greedy demands for more — lots more — from us. So, despite the really incredible number of their other commitments, the Messrs. de Camp and Pratt have regularly visited Gavagan's and so dutifully recorded what they saw and heard there that with this, our second monthly issue, we are publishing the ninth *Gavagan's Bar story to appear in this magazine! During a recent visit to New York, one of your editors elicited a solemn oath from Mr. Pratt that he and Mr. de Camp would continue such visits and so keep our readers fully advised as to what happens to the respectable Mr. Cohan and his unique clientele. Mr. Pratt also expressed his and his partner's delight at the recent action of the Cleveland Science Fiction Society. That perceptive organization, eschewing all convention and tradition, gave the first of a series of projected awards for the outstanding contribution to contemporary science fiction to L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt for their "Gavagan's Bar" stories. An award that should please everyone!*

The Black Ball

by L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP *and*
FLETCHER PRATT

Mr. Witherwax was saying: ". . . and it says in this book that you could get to lift an elephant or maybe listen to what somebody was saying a couple of hundred miles away, just like you was in the room. All you got to do is get to be one of these chelas." (He pronounced it to rhyme — almost — with "feeler.")

"Why don't more people do it, then?" demanded Mr. Gross. "A fellow that could lift an elephant could make a lot of money with a circus or something."

"Mr. Cohan, give everybody another round," said Doc Brenner. "I can

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tell you why, Mr. Gross. It's not as easy as it sounds. In the first place, you have to find a genuine guru, or yogi, and most of them are fakes."

"Yeah," said Witherwax, "and then you gotta spend ten years sitting on spikes or something like that, and you only get about a cup of rice a day, and no Martinis, and this book says you dasn't even think about women, and by the time you done all that, what the hell, you wouldn't care whether you could lift an elephant or not, so it doesn't matter."

"That's about right," said Brenner. "It's like looking in one of those crystal balls. They say the people who really have one that works get so excited over what they see that they want to keep on seeing, and can't make any use of it."

"The statement is not universally true," said someone.

All three turned to look at a tall man with an air of histrionic dignity and a spray of gray around the edges of his hair, who had just placed on the bar one of the handled leather cases in which bowling-balls are transported.

"And what would you be having, Mr. Leaf?" asked Mr. Cohan.

"A Rob Roy," said the tall man. He turned to the others. "I am at present defending a client, a most unworldly man who arouses my deepest sympathy. I have every reason to believe that he not only possessed a genuine and functional crystal ball, but was an adept in its employment. Yet use was made of his discoveries."

"You're a lawyer?" asked Brenner.

"I am an attorney," said the tall man. Mr. Cohan said: "Make you acquainted. This is Counsellor Leaf, Mr. Witherwax, Mr. Gross, Doc Brenner. The next round is on the house."

Hands were shaken. Mr. Gross said: "Ain't you the Madison Leaf what defended my wife's cousin Irving, the time he got accused of putting the porcupine in the mayor's bed?"

"Ah, yes, a fascinating case. *People* vs. *Potasz*, as I remember."

"It was—" began Mr. Gross, but Brenner extended a hand. "I'd like to hear about this client with the crystal ball, if you can say anything about it before the trial."

"Yeah, me too," said Witherwax and Mr. Cohan said: "Me brother Julius, that's on the force, says you can get into a lot of trouble telling fortunes."

Madison Leaf delicately poised his second Rob Roy, the one that was on the house, and looked around until he was sure that his audience was giving him its full attention.

Gentlemen [he said, gravely], I have accepted this case without fee because I am convinced of the essential innocence of the unfortunate Mr.

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Jackson — that is, his innocence of the matter charged. It is true that he changed his name from the one originally given him to Bokar Rapurjee Jackson, but that is not a crime in this state and it may even be described as a legitimate device for the exercise of his peculiar profession. As to his claims to the cannon ball, I have been forced to advice him that they rest on legally dubious ground. No doubt a claim could be made out under the precedent in *Untervoort* vs. *Vandermyer*, as given in the 43rd volume of the Wisconsin reports. However, judgment would doubtless encounter the opposition of the Indian government, and as the U. S. Circuit Court decided in the matter of Mayfine —

[Witherwax said: "I don't understand these complications."

[Madison Leaf bowed. "Quite correct. Under the influence of such agreeable company and Mr. Cohan's excellent beverages, I had momentarily forgotten that I was not addressing a professional audience. I beg your pardon."]

Mr. Jackson applied to me in — no, that is not quite correct, I shall have to go back and lay the foundation. Very well; there was a gentleman, and I use the word advisedly, named Frederick Washington. Now, the late Frederick Washington. A gentleman of color, of dark color; and a most remarkable character. My connection with Mr. Washington began when he besought my good offices in composing certain differences between the group of which he was the leader and another group of similar ambiance.

I will explain; the late Mr. Washington, at the time he sought me, was engaged in the promotion of a sport, or game, having to do with predicting the order in which certain figures would recur in the reports of the New York Stock Exchange. This sport is somewhat extensively engaged in, and the rewards for success are considerable.

I understood from Mr. Washington that he began to engage in this sport as one of those who risk certain sums of money on their ability to forecast series of numbers. In this endeavor he had become so very successful that he had accumulated an amount of capital which permitted others to make wagers with him.

[Mr. Cohan frowned. "Me brother Julius says the whole numbers game is a racket," he said.

[Madison Leaf regarded him from the distance of miles and centuries.

["To refer to a man's business as a "racket" is an actionable statement," he said. "I may say that I contemplate no action however, and as the heirs of the late Mr. Washington may be somehow difficult to discover, I do not think you are in danger."]

Mr. Washington was naturally aware that other entrepreneurs were engaged in the promotion of the same sport. The reason he applied to me

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was that he wished to suggest the drawing of an agreement, under which players in one geographical part of the city became automatically patrons of his game, while the remainder would operate through another gentleman, who had been in the business for some time — Mr. Angelo Carnuto.

I pointed out to Mr. Washington that such an agreement would probably be without legal force, if written. "Look," he said. "I can ruin this Carnuto's racket any time I want, but peace is a wonderful thing and I would like to have more of it."

I concurred that it is always better to settle differences by agreement than by any other means. I also remarked that I would be glad to act as Mr. Washington's emissary before Mr. Carnuto, but that it would be necessary for me to understand the full strength of the position I was representing. It was therefore desirable that he inform me of what means he proposed to use in ruining Mr. Carnuto's business, provided no agreement were reached.

Somewhat to my astonishment, he demurred, and in a highly evasive manner. I opened the interview by imagining that he had crude physical violence in mind, but Mr. Washington's approach convinced me that it was something subtler and perhaps more dangerous. I therefore informed him that unless he gave me his full confidence, I could not act as his attorney. He threatened to retain someone else; I advised him to do so, merely remarking that as I had performed some legal services for Mr. Carnuto and possessed his confidence, few other emissaries would find him so approachable.

At this point in our conversation which, I may mention, took place in Mr. Washington's office, there entered one of his assistants. This gentleman was in a state of considerable agitation. He said he had received a telephonic message to the effect that unless Mr. Washington laid off — as he put it — his intestines would be wound around a door-knob.

Mr. Washington was evidently not a man of great physical courage. His countenance assumed a singularly unpleasant color. I may say that the event was not entirely fortuitous. It is a lawyer's duty to be prepared for all eventualities required by the humble service of his client —

[Gross belched loudly. Madison Leaf threw back his head and then apparently decided that this was not intended as a comment.]

Mr. Cohan [he said], will you please give us more of the same prescription? It is an attorney's duty to become aware of all facts that may benefit his client. I had not neglected that duty. When Mr. Washington summoned me, I was already somewhat aware of what he might have in mind, since, as I have said, I was not unacquainted with Mr. Carnuto. In fact, I had informed Mr. Carnuto that I proposed to call on Mr. Washington and suggested to him that if our conference were interrupted by such a telephone

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call as the one actually received, a peaceable settlement might become easier.

Mr. Carnuto might, indeed, have adopted a threatening attitude earlier. But he was most anxious to adjust matters so that this sport might be carried on in a manner pleasing and profitable to all parties concerned; and the plain fact was that while Mr. Washington's business was known to be operating in a manner gratifying to himself, Mr. Carnuto's own business was showing a startling decline in profits. Analysis showed this to be due to the fact that players in the Negro section of the city were showing an extraordinary ability to select the winning numbers. Mr. Carnuto was convinced that the appearance of Mr. Washington on the scene had something to do with this, but feared that the mere elimination of the gentleman, without discovering what lay behind him, would only intensify the difficulty.

You may judge, therefore, that I was deeply interested when Mr. Washington originally remarked that he could ruin Mr. Carnuto's business. After he had a little recovered from the shock of the telephone call, therefore, I remarked that it was fortunate indeed that he had asked me to advise him; that I understood this to be practically a declaration of war between the two, but that I might still be able to avert trouble if Mr. Washington would honor me with his confidence.

Mr. Washington became sulky. I said nothing. The assistant who had brought the message said: "He want me to call him back by four o'clock, boss. What should I ought to tell him?"

Mr. Washington addressed me. "If I told you, you wouldn't never believe me," he said. "But I'll show you, and then you can tell Angie I sure got something."

We got into his car and proceeded to Rathburne Street, in the Negro section, to a small store in the middle of the block. There were curtains in what had been the show windows, which were far from clean. Across the door was rather crudely painted the words: "Church of the Living Light."

Inside the floor space was cut off by a curtain, in front of which a fat colored woman sat behind a kitchen table that had been painted with red enamel. She regarded me in an unflattering manner, which became still more unflattering when Mr. Washington said that we must see Mr. Jackson at once, but she made her way through the curtain. Presently she came back and announced: "The Master will see you."

Beyond the curtain there were four or five rows of folding chairs, and at the back of the room a low dais, one step up. On this was a table, and on the table a crystal ball about six inches in diameter. The only light in the room came from beneath this ball and shone through it up the face of a man who stood over it. He was quite tall, a light-skinned Negro, made to

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appear taller by the dais, the light and the fact that he was wearing a turban.

He screwed up his eyes as Mr. Washington came in, and pronounced with an accent that I would describe as solemn: "Brother, have you brought another brother to the sacred light?"

Mr. Washington's directness was admirable. He said: "This ain't no sucker, Bokar. This is Mr. Leaf, the great big lawyer. He's going to fix things up with that Carnuto for us, only he's got to have a demonstration."

"What kind of demonstration?" said the tall man, and sat down.

It was already apparent to me that this so-called church was a cover for an illegal fortune-telling activity, a fact of which I took mental cognizance for possible future use. I suggested that it would be very convincing to me if Mr. Jackson could predict the action the court would take in the case of *Chase* vs. *Bascom Corp.*, which I then had pending on appeal.

"No, sir," said Mr. Jackson. "This here ball won't show me nothing but figures. Got to be something with figures in it."

"Very well," I said. "What will be the stock exchange quotation on Republic Oil next Friday?"

Mr. Jackson seated himself before the ball and gazed into it intently. After a minute or two, still gazing, he said: "It's gonna be 44.375."

I made a note of this figure and then suggested that to convince Mr. Carnuto, it might be as well if I were also furnished with the numbers that would win in the game on that day. They were readily furnished and we left.

In the car, I asked Mr. Washington about the ball, which to me resembled a type that is made commercially by a firm in Pittsburgh. He said that Mr. Jackson had secured it in India, where he had gone as a sailor during the war, and at the same time he had changed his name. When I inquired further as to how so valuable an object had been released, Mr. Washington again became evasive, and shortly afterward we reached the place where he dropped me off.

Gentlemen, I am an officer of the court and accustomed to weighing evidence. I admit that it is only surmise on my part that Mr. Jackson had deserted his ship in India, passed himself off as a Hindu and stolen the ball. Some knowledge of something like this is required to account for the fact that Mr. Washington had a hold over him, over and above the obvious psychological dominance. The question of whether a series of numbers could be correctly predicted, however, admitted of evidential proof. The evidence already at hand indicated that Mr. Washington was producing deleterious effects on Mr. Carnuto's business. I was now in a position to complete the chain.

I accordingly wrote out the numbers Mr. Jackson had given me, sealed the paper in an envelope and left it with Mr. Carnuto, asking him not to

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open it until Friday. I informed him of Mr. Jackson's possession of the ball, advised him to consider what would have been the result had I wagered an important sum of money on these numbers instead of the small amounts Mr. Washington had clearly been placing through intermediaries. I suggested that in the event these proved to be the winning numbers, it might be advisable to acceed to Mr. Washington's request for a division of territory.

I fear that in so doing, I applied the wrong type of stimulus to a man of Mr. Carnuto's somewhat forthright disposition. He agreed. When Friday arrived and with it the exact predicted figures both as to Republic Oil and the numbers, I accordingly telephoned Mr. Washington to tell him his proposition would be accepted. There was no answer, nor was there during the succeeding days. In fact, the next time Mr. Washington came to my attention, it was by way of an item in the newspapers. Some boys swimming in the Freeport River discovered that the unfortunate gentleman had apparently stepped into a tub of fresh concrete and then fallen in.

Upon this discovery, I went around to the Church of the Living Light, but found the premises occupied by a grocery store, whose occupants denied all knowledge of Mr. Jackson or his establishment. In view of Mr. Carnuto's attitude, I hardly thought it advisable to pursue matters further. In fact, I heard no more of any phase of the matter until very recently, when I received a message from Mr. Jackson. He was in jail, having been arrested on a charge of espionage, and desired me to defend him.

To say that I was astonished would be putting it mildly. But I am not the type of lawyer who refuses a case because a client is poor and friendless and the charges against him serious. I hurried to the house of detention.

"As your attorney, I shall of course assume your essential innocence," I told him. "But I think it would be wise to tell me exactly what happened."

"It was that Washington," he said. "He was a bad one. I told him we going to have trouble if he told anybody where he got the numbers from, but he must of told that Carnuto. Somebody did."

I did not think it well to pursue this subject, so I told him to proceed with the detail of why he had been arrested.

"I was just trying to get my ball back, that's all, and those dumb soldiers pinch me."

I asked him to give the circumstances. He said: "A couple days after you was in my place one of the boys called me up and said this Carnuto found out about me and my ball and he was coming to get the ball. People like that know too many people. I figured there wasn't any good place I could hide out around, and I sure didn't want them to get that ball. So I remembered that out at old Fort Osterhaus, where they got the park, there's

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a whole lot of piles of cannon balls from the Civil War or something, and I painted my ball all over black and took it out there and put it in one of the piles instead of one of the balls was there. It fitted just like the skin on a frog and I dumped the regular cannon ball into the river. Then I went away to New Orleans for a while, and when I read in the paper how this Carnuto got hisself killed, I come back. But when I went out there to Fort Osterhaus to get my ball, there was a lot of soldiers around and they throwed me in jail. All I want is my ball."

I am sure, gentlemen, that you are aware of an item of news which was evidently overlooked by Mr. Jackson in New Orleans — that in the interval between the disappearance of Mr. Washington and the date when Mr. Carnuto was assassinated by some of his associates, Fort Osterhaus had been taken over by the Atomic Energy Commission for the installation of one of their most secret projects. I can understand how the guards would take a rather strict view of Mr. Jackson's nocturnal presence, especially when he explained that he was looking for a crystal ball in one of the piles of cannon balls. It must have seemed a singularly transparent excuse. However, I do not anticipate any difficulty in clearing him; there is no real evidence against him for anything but a simple trespass.

There was a momentary silence. Brenner said: "But what's the bowling ball got to do with it?"

"Why," said Madison Leaf, "I am now on my way to Fort Osterhaus to offer it to the commandant there in exchange for Mr. Jackson's ball, if that object can be found. It will not unduly disturb the decorative scheme."

"Why don't you wait until you get him out of jail and take him along to show you where it is?"

Madison Leaf looked dignified. "That might result in his putting in a claim for what is really abandoned property. That would lead not only to a regrettable beclouding of the issue at hand but would result in Mr. Jackson's placing himself in an untenable legal position. I refer you, of course, to oyer and trover, postulated in the English common law as set forth in IV D Edward III: 351. The statute actually calls upon the finder to divide proceeds with the King, but as he may be considered to have abdicated his claims as far as the United States are concerned, it may be assumed that said finder, if American, is entitled to keep what he may discover. *In toto*. The ruling case, I believe, is that of the *State* vs. *Morgan*, wherein the Court found for the defendant."

He downed the last of his Rob Roy and picked up his bowling ball. "Yes," he said, "if the ball cannot be found after his release, the legal aspect will be much simplified. Good evening, gentlemen."

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Such is J. T. M'Intosh's ability to construct a vivid, suspenseful story that any comment of ours not only would be extraneous but would certainly give away his beautifully developed plot. So we will only remark that here is that not too commonplace combination of story and *thinking. Mr. M'Intosh is a highly original thinker and we feel you'll find his concepts both pleasing and challenging. We ourselves are in full agreement with Mr. M'Intosh's opinions on all matters save one — his own writing. It's a truism of the trade that no writer can judge his own work and when he wrote us that he didn't "expect we'd like" this story, we were almost positive he was going to be wrong. He was.*

Talents

by J. T. M'INTOSH

I WAKENED by easy stages and stared at the ceiling. It was immediately clear what had wakened me — I wasn't deaf. In the next room Uncle Elliot was furiously battering something.

When you're used to being wakened by sounds of violent, impatient activity, you form the habit of not getting up until you have a good idea of what's going on this particular morning. But having decided that Uncle Elliot was only pounding a piece of rock with a hammer, I was ready to get up and face the new day, and did.

He wasn't selfish or inconsiderate; it was just that what he was doing always seemed to him far more important than someone else's sleep or rest or breakfast or peace of mind. Fortunately John was understanding, as fiancés go, and knew that when I was two hours late for a date I wasn't nestling in someone else's arms, but merely holding a torch or calling out dial readings.

I got out of bed, put my head out of the window and rolled the morning round on my tongue. It was one of those annoyingly indeterminate days, not sure yet whether it was a freezer or a scorcher. So I decided not to commit myself in the matter of dress and put on a wrap for the moment. I didn't wash, for if I was to help Uncle Elliot to pound rock I would have to wash again afterwards, anyway.

As I went into the workroom the battering ceased. Uncle Elliott became

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a statue staring at his piece of rock. How he lifted it on to the work bench was a puzzle. He's still strong, but the rock was the size of a truck wheel.

I can't say exactly how I felt when I saw what he was doing. Pleased and miserable and sorry and happy and resigned and frightened and a few other things. For you see, not long since I had dug up a piece of rock too. So had a lot of other people. It was becoming quite a habit among people of imagination. John was lucky. Instead of rock he only had to dig in soft soil; but then, of course, he had to dig much deeper. I hadn't enjoyed what happened after I dug up my piece of rock. Neither would Uncle Elliot. Some people had died of things like that. No, you couldn't call it natural death. I had killed one of them myself.

I stood and waited for him to do or say something, forcing myself back to normal. When I felt faintly amused I knew I was all right.

I couldn't remember Uncle Elliot ever before staying still for so long. He was a tall man put together so carelessly that every movement he made looked like a mistake. When he reached for the sugar you always thought he really wanted the cream.

"Well?" I said at last.

"Junior," he replied slowly, "when you see the impossible, what do you do?"

He usually called me Junior, for no apparent reason other than that he always had to be different.

"Decide it wasn't impossible, or that I didn't see it," I told him.

"What's that?" he asked, pointing. I joined him at the work bench and examined the little black object lying among the rock dust.

"Your guess is as good as mine," I said. That wasn't quite true. I could have told him quite a lot about the thing. Even the name that was being given to it and all its tiny brothers and sisters. We called them dingers, because the first of them had been found in Germany, and the first of Us to examine it had called it, with a flash of genius, *das Ding*.

It was an ovoid two and a half inches long, with one end drawn into a point. It had no markings of any kind; it was matte black, metal, and very light.

With a suddenness that made me blink Uncle Elliot swooped on the hammer and dealt the rock a blow that sent chips flying. One hit me on the arm. Uncle Elliot didn't mind; he didn't feel it.

"That rock," he said petulantly, "is thousands, maybe millions of years old. And this thing comes along and bores six feet into it, leaving a little hole the size of my finger. It isn't even scratched."

He picked it up. I edged away. It was heartless, perhaps, but there it was. Uncle Elliot had found the thing, it was his, and he was stuck with it. No-

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body had been around when I started fooling with mine. My affection for the old fellow wasn't relevant — not for the next few minutes, anyway.

"If you don't mind," I said, "I'll go and wash."

He wouldn't notice that my departure was rather abrupt — just as he started examining the dinger. He was too interested in what he was doing.

Uncle Elliot wasn't a scientist, though he was sometimes called that. He was a gadgeteer. He tinkered with things so curiously, so patiently, that he was bound to find hundreds of things that worked. He made money, but that was incidental. Ninety-nine out of a hundred of his patents were for the usual crazy things that crazy people patent. Gadgets to do things that were much more easily, efficiently, rapidly and inexpensively done by a human hand or foot. Machines to open garage doors, close windows, open letters, fold paper, cut firewood, provide change, switch things on and off — the kind of thing occasionally described in magazines to show how crazy so-called scientists could be. It wasn't that they didn't work. They all worked. The question was whether the thing they were constructed to do was worth doing, that way, at that price.

But since Uncle Elliot wasn't really crazy, sometimes he'd see the real need for a gadget to make life easier in some small way, make it, and sell the idea in a surprisingly business-like manner. There was the fire alarm that checked on any unaccountable combustion in an empty or sleeping house, and had the sense to decide when it didn't matter, when to ring up the owner, and when to get straight through to the fire station. There was the gadget that drained car radiators about to freeze up, the burned-out-fuse-replacer, the Elliot Riley sound-trap system, the pocket dictaphone and the paper splicer. These differed from the others in that they did cheaply and efficiently a job that a lot of people sometimes wanted done.

The house, however, was filled with things that weren't economic, weren't always efficient and were used simply because Uncle Elliot had spent a lot of time on them and I hadn't the heart to throw them out. In the bathroom, for example, I used the automatic teeth-brusher, the hair-comber, manicurist and perfumer, and then pressed buttons to have the clothes I wanted delivered from my bedroom by chute. (The disadvantage of that was that anyone who used the bathroom usually pressed every button in sight to find out what they were for.)

I knew what Uncle Elliot would be doing. He would examine the dinger carefully through a magnifying glass, and at last he would see the tiny hair-line round it. He would try to unscrew the little ovoid, fail, and then find it coming mysteriously apart in his hands. I didn't hurry. It would be best for me to leave him entirely alone for a few hours.

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I rang up John from the hall. We had pre-set numbers, of course; I merely had to press a button and the phone rang John's number for me. Utterly pointless, since I had to stand waiting, doing nothing anyway. But that was the pattern of most of Uncle Elliot's gadgets.

"Hallo, Tich," said John. What with Uncle Elliot calling me Junior and John calling me Tich I had almost forgotten my name was Donna. "Going to be hot. Coming for a swim?"

"Is it? I was just wondering. If you guarantee it, I'll be right over."

"Good. See you at the pool."

"Oi, oi, oi," I retorted. "Don't hang up. Think I called for you to tell me it was going to be hot?"

"I don't know. You might have done. You're not very smart."

"Uncle Elliot's just found a dinger."

He was serious at once. "Oh. Do I say I'm sorry or I'm glad?"

"That's the hell of it," I said doubtfully. We didn't have to explain much to each other, and if there had been any explaining to be done, it wouldn't have been over the telephone. "You can look at Uncle Elliot more objectively than I can. Which should I be, do you think?"

There was a long pause. "Well, obviously you should be glad," said John at last. "If you could have looked at it objectively enough, you'd have been impatient for Uncle Elliot to find a dinger. Isn't that right?"

"I suppose so. But I can't forget Tom Berry," I said bitterly.

"Don't take it that way. He had to die. Anyway, Uncle Elliot isn't like Tom Berry. He won't fight. . . ."

He stopped lamely. We both knew perfectly well that Uncle Elliot *would* fight. That was why I hadn't been unreservedly glad when I saw him with the dinger.

"Oh, well," said John. "Don't worry, Tich. What you could do, Uncle Elliot can do now. Come over and have a swim."

I hung up. Incidentally, we didn't say all that.

I went back to the workroom to see how Uncle Elliot was getting on. As I expected, he had the capsule open. It was filled with the same inert-looking jelly that the dingers always contained. I didn't say anything. He wouldn't hear me. He was holding the two bits of the capsule in his hand, staring at them and the black jelly. I left him to it. Soon he would eat the jelly. Just like that.

It was gradually becoming clear that it was as hot as ever, and since my services weren't required in a technical capacity, like swinging a hammer, now that Uncle Elliot had found and opened the dinger, I collected my swimsuit and went out.

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My car was the proceeds of a gadget that never went on the market. The cinema industry had paid Uncle Elliot to suppress it. That was another way of making money.

There were children playing in the shadow of some trees near our house, and I remembered belatedly that they were on holiday from school. The pool would be swarming with them. I have a guilty secret. There's something wrong with the maternal in me. Instead of cooing ecstatically when confronted with kids, I find I often want to knock their heads together. Of course, my own kids might be different. I fondly hope so. John says they won't be. He insists that his kids and mine will be yelling, screaming terrors. And he has an infuriating habit of being right.

I left the car at the parking-lot just outside the town and walked the rest of the way. John was at the pool before me, because he lives nearer. I identified him easily among hundreds of thousands of kids, because he was bigger. I always used to say I was going to marry someone just four inches taller than me. "You mean a midget?" Uncle Elliot had asked. Well, the same thing had happened to that childish idea as happens to most of our early dreams. John was fully a foot taller than I was.

We didn't try to talk about Uncle Elliot. "Every time I see you in a bathing costume, Tich," John told me, "you seem to have shrunk."

"I want it to be clearly understood," I retorted, "that though I haven't much of many things, there's nothing wrong with what I've got. I stand for quality, not quantity."

He picked up half the pool in his vast hands and threw it over me derisively.

"You're big, brutal and cruel," I said. "Also stupid. I should have mentioned that first."

When we were in the water I got my own back, as usual. John isn't a bad swimmer. He even won a cup once. But when we have a race I sometimes take pity on him and go round him once or twice. When we reached the end of the pool I told him kindly: "You'd get here much faster if you swam the other way." Having no breath to speak, he didn't have to try to find an answer.

We tried to ignore the kids. Maybe somewhere, some time, someone succeeded in ignoring kids. I never heard of him.

They watched me dive. I was devoting too much attention to ignoring them and hit the water with a crack like a gunshot. They were still laughing when I came up. So was John. They all knew, I expect, that I was supposed to be a swimmer.

Then some of the kids began to whistle. Some whistles you don't mind, others you would just as soon do without. These belonged to the second

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group. Next one of them showed us how to dive. Another gave a pantomime of searching for something on the bank, and made it clear in a piercing shout he was looking for a lifebelt to throw to us.

"Call yourself a man?" I asked John bitterly. "Can't you do something about fresh kids?"

"No," he said simply.

I know when I'm beaten. I'm no more nervous or self-conscious than the next but I saw the odds were against me. "Come on, then," I told John. We fled. We didn't even wait to dress. We simply picked up our clothes and ran.

Of course we had to run into Mr. Llewellyn, just far enough from the pool and just near enough our nice, neat respectable town for him to blink at us and ask himself rapidly whether to look through us and not see us or to pretend we were dressed. It would be all over town in half an hour that John and I had been running about the streets naked. The facts that we weren't running, weren't in the streets and weren't naked were only facts and would therefore cut no ice. It would do us no good, either, to say we were Archimedes and had just discovered our Principle.

We made the best of it, smiled brightly at Mr. Llewellyn, said "It's hot, isn't it?" and passed on.

John, of course, thought it was a great joke. I held out for a while, and then started laughing too. But then suddenly we both remembered Uncle Elliot, whom we had successfully forgotten for quite a while, and looked at each other seriously.

"I'll come over tomorrow night," said John. "We should be able to see how it's going by that time. Don't worry about anything. I'll get in touch with Dr. Shumaker."

"Don't worry," I repeated mutinously. "You've never had anyone you cared about going through it."

He raised his eyebrows. "Haven't I?" he said gently. "How about you?"

My mouth dropped open. I'd never thought of that. John had found his dinger early. He'd had to watch and wait while I was learning what he had learned. We all had to do it. There was no short cut.

I reached the car and drove back. I had forgotten the children playing under the trees near the house. I was doing seventy as I flashed into their shade.

A mere baby — he couldn't have been more than two and a half — dropped his ball and toddled out into the road for it. Seventy miles an hour is over 100 feet a second. He wasn't 100 feet from me when he stumbled out into my path.

I did things with the accelerator, the brakes and the wheel. I skidded

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neatly round the child. Neat was the word. It was the neatest thing I ever did in my life. I glanced back and saw him toddling back off the road, completely unconcerned. Lucky kid.

But I sensed trouble as I drew up before the house. Uncle Elliot was on the veranda. "Hi," I said casually.

"That was a good trick," he said in a strange voice.

"Yes, wasn't it?" It was no use trying to pretend there was nothing unusual about the way I avoided the child in the road. It was like being caught walking on the ceiling. There wasn't much point in saying one had done it by mistake.

I saw horror gradually take over in Uncle Elliot's face as he worked something out. This had nothing to do with the dinger — he was still himself. He loved me, you see. In his own way he thought I was wonderful. Anything I did was right and perfect — that is, when he was being serious. And now his essentially logical mind told him something he hated.

"Tom Berry," he said, to himself. "They scraped him off the front of your car. There were twenty witnesses to say you couldn't have avoided him. The chief of police himself was there to see what happened. No stain was left on your driving record."

He caught my eye. My gaze didn't flinch; it was his that dropped.

"Then this," he muttered. "It was impossible to avoid that child. That didn't bother you. What's a miracle or two between friends? What was the difference, Donna, between the child you saved — and the man you murdered?"

The fact that he called me Donna showed how serious it was. I said a word or two in an effort to convince him he was wrong, but stopped before I started. I'd known Uncle Elliot since I was born. I would be wasting my time.

Uncle Elliot had one of the gifts of a great scientist. He knew when he was on the right track. Intuition is the only word for it. A man like that will try one line of investigation and discard it, unexplored, knowing the answer isn't there. Then he'll find a line and stick to it despite hundreds of disappointments, knowing that somewhere along the line lies what he's looking for.

The evidence Uncle Elliot had was flimsy, and the conclusion fantastic. I might be able to work miracles sometimes and not others. I might only just have learned whatever it was that enabled me to avoid the child in the road.

But this didn't affect Uncle Elliot. He had the truth and he knew it.

"Listen, Uncle Elliot," I said quietly. "People don't suddenly change, and you've known me all my life. Do you think I've changed?"

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He looked at me uncertainly. I fought to be calm, for it was absolutely necessary that Uncle Elliot should be easy in his mind about Tom Berry. He would have enough on his plate soon without being bothered by the knowledge that the person he loved most was a cold killer.

"You have changed a little recently," he said.

"For the worse?"

"No. You've seemed happier, more clear-headed, cleverer — almost like —"

I interrupted him quickly. "Personally," I said. "In the way I look on things and people — has that changed?"

He shook his head.

"Then please — *please* trust what you know of me. Will you do that, Uncle Elliot? Remember, it's me, Junior. Free, white, and twenty-two. Money in the bank — your money, and what's yours is mine. Happy, and engaged to a wonderful fellow. And sane — remember that too. Then ask yourself why I should go around murdering people."

"Just one thing. Does John know?"

I nodded. So did Uncle Elliot. "Then I can put it aside for a while," he said contentedly. I breathed a sigh of relief. That was Uncle Elliot. For him, life was full of many things, large and small. Quite a lot of them bothered him, like how he was going to get his new gimmick to work. Others he would gladly drop until he wasn't so busy. We hadn't always had money. Once it had been bills he had had to forget about for a while. Now it was merely my explanation for something. A bit thing it might be, but I was all right and John was all right. So it couldn't really be anything to worry about. It was as simple as that.

It was a few hours later when the first sign of something quite different showed. I was fixing dinner.

"Junior!" Uncle Elliot shouted from his workroom. "Ring the Browns and tell them I'm too busy tonight."

"Okay," I called back.

He wasn't used to it yet. He had his signals crossed. It would be half an hour yet before the Browns rang up and asked us over for bridge.

The next night John came as he had promised. One thing about John, you never have to wait for him to come to the point. He began: "How's Uncle Elliot taking —"

"Hallo, John. Take your hat off."

"Has he —"

"He's busy. Is your head cold?"

"Damn it, I come over here and you —"

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"Oh well, I suppose I'll get used to it. Keep it on. Sorry I mentioned it."

Suddenly he grinned. "You're great, Tich. I've always said so. I wonder why the rest of American manhood is giving in so easily."

"All right," I said. "You've made your point. Don't bother about the hat. It suits you."

He took it off and threw it at me.

I told him all that had happened since I saw him. Uncle Elliot by now was very definitely a telepath, but he hadn't realised it yet. He would casually answer remarks I hadn't made, comment on what was going on in Neuberg as if he'd been there, wonder why Mrs. Henderson should say such a thing, although he hadn't been near Mrs. Henderson (an old lady who lived along the road) and when he wouldn't have heard anything if he had. It just hadn't occurred to him that he had new talents. He took in, and used, the information floating about in the ether as if he heard it or saw it, not knowing there was any other way of trapping it.

John could have known all that, of course. But unlike Uncle Elliot, who didn't know what was going on, or even that there was anything very remarkable going on, we were very careful. Later we would use our talents as they were meant to be used. But meanwhile we waited, while more and more people found dingers. The only time in the last few days when I had used the talent that Uncle Elliot was just discovering was when I'd been talking to John on the phone and hadn't wanted to say in so many words that I'd killed Tom Berry.

And now. Only we were using it in reverse. We weren't broadcasting. We were keeping Uncle Elliot, up in his workroom, from knowing what we were thinking and saying.

"I've seen Shumaker," said John. "All you have to do is take Uncle Elliot into town tomorrow afternoon in the car. We'll handle the rest. If we just took him quietly to the hospital, without stage-setting, people would wonder. We can't get him to tell people he's going away."

"What's going to happen, exactly?" I asked.

He told me. I frowned.

"Don't say it," said John. "You don't like it."

"Oh, I don't mind as far as Uncle Elliot's concerned. But do you think people will swallow it? Uncle Elliot's been sane for forty-nine years. Who's going to believe in this sudden brainstorm?"

"Everybody," retorted John. "A lot of people are going to see it. And everyone will say 'I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes.' Which means they *will* believe it."

I sighed. "I can't help thinking there should be a simpler way. Why must it always be so complicated?"

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Uncle Elliot came in then. "Hallo, John," he said without surprise. "Say, you're a chemist. Is there such a thing as a substance people just have to eat?"

This was always the difficult part. Seeing me avoid the child in the road the day before had put the matter out of Uncle Elliot's mind for the moment. He hadn't mentioned it to me at all, probably because it didn't occur to him as a possibility that I might be able to explain it.

"What do you mean, exactly?" asked John cautiously.

Uncle Elliot told him about the dinger, calling on me for confirmation, as if afraid John wasn't going to believe a word of the story.

"And then," he said, in complete puzzlement, "I found I was eating the stuff. It had no taste at all. I couldn't chew it. It just slipped down like a drink of water."

He looked at us challengingly, daring us to say he was crazy. We didn't say anything. There wasn't a routine for this. It was inherently inexplicable. Usually no explanation was needed. Few people would admit they ate something they knew nothing about, for no reason whatsoever.

But Uncle Elliot didn't believe anything was inexplicable. "I wondered," he said, "whether a thing could be scented so that people were compelled to eat it. I didn't notice any smell, but . . . it must have been something. Could it be some sort of drug that creates its own craving? I know that's fantastic. It's no more fantastic than the fact that I —"

"Have you noticed any change in yourself?"

"None whatever," said Uncle Elliot blithely. It was always like that. People didn't notice at first that they had become telepaths. When they did notice, they reacted in a hundred different ways.

"Have you seen a doctor?"

"Quacks," said Uncle Elliot derisively. "Never go near 'em."

"But if it were some kind of poison —"

"Wherever it came from, nobody knows anything about it. So if it's a poison, there won't be an antidote. But never mind about that. All I want to know is . . ."

Nobody could tell him what he wanted to know. So we all had to agree it was very strange, and say we'd all watch out for any suggestion that someone else had had the same experience. Uncle Elliot wasn't satisfied but we couldn't help that. It wasn't possible to satisfy him. We could hardly tell him — yet — that what he had eaten had spread through his body in the bloodstream and would be a part of him until he died.

The next day I told Uncle Elliot he needed fresh air, and took him out to get some. The scene, I knew, was going to be played like a bad movie —

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all action and no motivation. The trouble was, Uncle Elliot didn't know his part, and we couldn't tell him.

In the square I saw Frank Williams sauntering about, as arranged. Frank was one of Us. His part in this serio-comedy was merely to walk about thinking luridly of how he was going to murder his wife Maude that night. (He wasn't really.) He did his job well — too well, I thought. I caught a whiff of it from across the square and nearly ran into the car in front. Hurriedly I averted my mind.

Uncle Elliot still hadn't noticed he had a new gift, but he would at any moment now. It wasn't very selective yet. I had to stop the car pretty close to Frank. Then Uncle Elliot got it. He paused for a moment, incredulous, and then darted out of the car and across to Frank.

The time had been chosen well. At least forty people saw Uncle Elliot, without introduction and for no apparent reason, knock Frank down. "Kill your wife, would you!" he shouted. "Cut her up into little pieces, would you! Why, you. . . ."

I had never heard Uncle Elliot use such language. It was quite a revelation.

After a decent interval (poor Frank was in a fair way to being battered to a pulp) I got out of the car and rushed after Uncle Elliot. Nobody had interfered, though a crowd had gathered. I reached the fighters with a large part of our local police, Inspector Shaw, and together we dragged Uncle Elliot off Frank.

The stage management was good, if not the script. Frank managed to look like a hospital case, Dr. Shumaker came up, was recognized, and joined the little group in the center of the crowd. Inspector Shaw, who knew Uncle Elliot, was saying something reluctantly about having to take him in. I said no, and gestured at Dr. Shumaker. The inspector's eyes widened. Somebody said, "Who'd have thought it?"

"Mr. Riley has been under my care before," said Dr. Shumaker. He was a big, beaming man who looked every inch the psychologist — which was right and proper, as he was director of the Magerson Psychiatric Hospital. The inspector turned to me, reluctant to believe this of Uncle Elliot. I nodded.

It didn't take us long then to get it straightened out. Frank acted dazed, as if he didn't know what it was all about. Riley had simply attacked him without warning, he said plaintively — and he hardly knew the old buzzard. Shouted something about killing his wife. Uncle Elliot was the injured innocent. He had only done what was right. Dr. Shumaker was hush-hush, professional, we-mustn't-talk-like-this-before-the-patient, let's-get-him-away-quietly. I was frightened and tearful and looked trustingly at Dr. Shumaker.

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So the inspector came along with us to escort Uncle Elliot to the hospital, Dr. Shumaker making himself responsible for the patient. Frank allowed himself to look a little better now that it was settled. He said there wouldn't be any charges if the old buzzard (or something like that) was kept locked up.

There was one brief period when Uncle Elliot tried to stand on his rights. But he couldn't say "I want my lawyer," because he didn't have a lawyer. Besides, with the confidence of the perfectly sane, he was quite sure there was nothing to worry about.

"That's all there was to it," Uncle Elliot said.

We were in Dr. Shumaker's office. I had wanted to go, but Uncle Elliot was so insistent that I stay with him that I'd had to give in. "I'd do the same again. Don't you see the man can't harm his wife now that I've made a scene about it?"

"The point seems to be," said Dr. Shumaker gently, "how you knew that a man who didn't say a word to you was going to kill his wife."

"I've told you. I hadn't thought of it before, but it must have been telepathy. I see that now. Haven't you heard of telepathy?"

Poor Uncle Elliot was putting his foot in it. I had known he would. He accepted new ideas so easily he had never quite realised that some people wouldn't accept them at all. So he was a telepath. That was very interesting. Dr. Shumaker should be interested too. Everyone should be interested.

"Yes, of course I've heard of telepathy," Dr. Shumaker said agreeably.

"You don't believe me. I don't give a damn. I'll show you. It's a thing that's very easy to prove."

"You can read my thoughts now, for example?"

"Sure." Uncle Elliot concentrated.

I was glad I was sitting behind him, out of the way, and couldn't see his expression when he found that he could get absolutely nothing from the doctor's mind.

"Come, Mr. Riley," said Shumaker, with faint irony, "surely you can find something. Perhaps you would care to tell me what your niece is thinking, instead?"

Uncle Elliot turned to me in relief. Shumaker might be a freak, a complete non-telepath, but he knew I wasn't. Things were rapidly being redocketed in his mind. He'd caught my thoughts before, though he didn't know what was happening then.

I did see his expression this time. I saw he began to doubt himself for the first time, his new gift and even his sanity, when he found it absolutely impossible to probe my thoughts.

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"Or Mr. John Hilton?" Dr. Shumaker suggested. "I understand he's downstairs, waiting for Miss Riley."

"Yes, get him up," said Uncle Elliot. But I could see that by this time he was doubtful.

He was right to be doubtful. John came in, looking concerned. His mind was as tightly shut as Shumaker's and mine had been. But then I saw relief show in Uncle Elliot's face.

"You had me worried," he said. "But I can still catch thoughts from the town. Hundreds of them, like an orchestra all playing different tunes. But I can sort them out. I can show you. . . ."

"I think," said Shumaker sadly to me, "you had better leave your uncle with me, Miss Riley. Call back in a few hours' time, if you please.

To cover my exit I burst into tears and was escorted from the room by John.

We walked down the long, sterile corridors. "Poor Uncle Elliot," I said miserably.

"We all had to go through it," John reminded me.

"Not you earlier ones. You were just left to muddle through."

"Yes — and not all of us did. Tom Berry didn't."

"Even now, there are still Tom Berrys."

"But not so many. Would you rather Uncle Elliot had been left to muddle through?"

I shook my head.

John looked at me inquiringly. "Going home — or are you going to watch?"

"I'll watch."

"It isn't nice."

"I know. Where do we go?"

We went into a tiny room, one wall of which was glass from floor to ceiling. But it was very heavy glass, and the other side was opaque. I shuddered. "I've never seen this before," I said.

We squeezed hands. We weren't superhuman — I hope I haven't given that impression. We were very human indeed, with a couple of things tacked on. The ability to read minds over long distances and never make any mistakes. If there was one right way to do anything, we could do it. Like doing exactly the right things with the brakes, throttle and wheel of a car to achieve anything which might be done by accident or intent. Like spinning a coin a thousand times so that it always came down the same way. Like shooting the center out of a target as if it had been punched by a die. Little things like that, things that don't matter compared with happiness and honesty and decency.

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But the other things came too. The very first of Us discovered something that might have been theorized, but I don't think ever was.

Let one mind touch another — give a mind a good soaking in another human mind — and all the irregularities, the psychoses, the uncertainty, the anxiety, the guilt rush out as if floodgates had been thrown open. Almost any two minds will do. It's like mixing two poisons to make something which is harmless. It's like letting light and fresh air into a dark, stinking dungeon — and incidentally stopping it being a dungeon.

It hadn't made much apparent difference to John and me, for we'd been pretty happy and contented characters anyway. But it had made a lot of difference to Frank Williams. He had been a prospective suicide. Finding a dinger saved him.

There were just three drawbacks. One, we couldn't do anything for people who didn't find and open dingers. We could read their minds, but that didn't help them. Two, there weren't dingers for everybody. Three, each dinger was a sort of Pandora's Box. Hope and sanity and understanding were there, but so were fear and misery and madness and death. Tom Berry had found out about that.

Dr. Shumaker brought Uncle Elliot into the room behind the glass. We stood very still, because though no one in that room could see us, they could hear.

"What the devil is this?" Uncle Elliot demanded.

"Now that we are here," said Dr. Shumaker genially, "I think we might as well have the truth, don't you?"

I won't repeat his story, for despite what he said it wasn't the truth. There were bits of the truth in it, that was all. When I had heard it I thought Shumaker was mad, but I had believed him. He has a screen-villain manner combined with a trick of his own — he conveys the impression that what happens to his victims is of no importance whatever.

The gist of it was that when these new talents started to develop — he frankly admitted now that there were new talents — a sort of secret society was formed to ensure that everyone who had them came up to a certain standard. Others couldn't be allowed to live. Uncle Elliot could please himself whether he worked for his life or accepted death.

I saw John go white in the glare from the next room. I guessed he was thinking of the last time he had heard this, when I was in the room. That part of what Shumaker said was true. Uncle Elliot had no choice but to work for his life or die.

Naturally when Shumaker was through Uncle Elliot jumped at him. I'd done that too. Shumaker moved in a way that was almost magical. It reminded Uncle Elliot of my avoiding the child in the road, for he drew

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back abruptly and asked: "Is Junior in this hellish society of yours?"

"Junior?"

"My niece," said Uncle Elliot impatiently. Everybody ought to know who Junior was.

Shumaker didn't answer. He merely turned and went out, and Uncle Elliot was alone in the room.

There's no need to make mysteries about the tests. There was another intelligence in Uncle Elliot's mind. He had to learn how to handle it or become another Tom Berry. We had to make him learn. If he failed — I shuddered — we would have to concoct a story about a maniacal frenzy in which Uncle Elliot died. Or, more likely, get him out of the hospital and arrange an artistic accident. That was what I had feared from the instant I saw him with the dinger.

Yes, I killed Tom Berry, and I would never feel completely happy about it. But I knew that what was left of Berry had been screaming for release. We were too late to give him anything else.

To survive, Uncle Elliot had to control the thing within his mind, assimilate it. If he lost out, the other being wouldn't try to survive. It would just give up. It would have no choice.

There was nothing in the room, not even a chair. There was no window. Uncle Elliot looked up at the electric lights, calculating, but there was nothing he could do with an electric supply and no apparatus. The pause was just long enough for him to look round and see all there was to be seen. Then the walls began to close in. He saw it at once. One wall was advancing slowly, steadily, to crush him against the other.

He wasted a few seconds examining the door and the contents of his pockets, while I held my breath. But then he saw what he had to do. His thought went out, questing, demanding. What was the answer? How was the room made? What was the way of escape?

We kept our minds closed. We weren't in this. He got what he wanted from a workman out in the grounds. The moving wall could be slid into a catch which stopped its advance. Uncle Elliot did that quickly, coolly.

For the first time he had used telepathy at will, to save his life.

It didn't take him long to smell the gas either. It was ordinary coal gas — quite effective in an almost unventilated room. Again he sought the answer outside his prison. But this wasn't so easy. From one mind (waiting with its message for him, if he only knew it) he learned that the gas came from the base of one of the lights, well out of his reach. From another he found it was impossible to burn the gas at its source, if he was considering that. From a third that there was no internal control whatever.

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We watched him consider that. No internal control! What, then, was he supposed to do? He grinned wryly. There was only one thing to do. Have someone outside his prison switch it off. Force him, mentally, to do it. He had no idea if that was possible, but it had to be tried.

The place really was a mental hospital. He contacted one of the nurses, but she knew nothing about it and he released her at once. He tried a doctor, with the same result.

So he went straight for Shumaker. This was unexpected. He had already failed with Shumaker, and he wasn't supposed to try again. But he attacked with such fury that Shumaker sent a guarded thought to me: "I like your uncle, Donna. He's got a refreshing habit of going right to the root of the matter."

Then Uncle Elliot found a porter who knew the set-up. There was a struggle which I won't try to describe. But the end was that the porter went and switched off the gas.

The next move was obvious and he didn't waste any time about making it. Why wait and let Shumaker carry on with his mad, melodramatic game? If he could make the porter switch off the gas, he could make him let him out.

But there was a snag. He got the porter outside the door, but only Shumaker had the key. Uncle Elliot let the porter go. Presumably he considered having the porter batter the door down, but decided he wouldn't get away with it.

"He's all right," John whispered. "Shall we go?"

"I just want to see the first of the co-ordination tests. That's the only thing that might bother him now."

There was a whole series of co-ordination tests, and if you cared about the person in the room, they were harrowing to watch. But the first wasn't really dangerous — only difficult and infuriating, for the person doing it.

A key suddenly swung from the ceiling. It was a big iron key, and one could see at a glance that it wouldn't open the door of the room. But Uncle Elliot would need it later — there was no trick about that.

He tried to catch it and it swung out of his grasp. He frowned. It looked too simple. He reached for the wire, above the key, hesitated, and touched it lightly and fleetingly. His caution was justified. He got a severe electric shock. Then he searched in his pockets. As if in warning, the wire crackled. Uncle Elliot threw a small handkerchief at it and there was an impressive little display. He wasn't meant to touch that wire, swinging about as it was, with or without insulation. It was now carrying much more power than when he had touched it.

Uncle Elliot examined the key without trying to catch it. It was well

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insulated from the wire. But once one grasped it, it looked as if it could be pulled away by force.

He made a few more passes at the key, and frowned again. One wire from the roof couldn't pull it about like that. There must be powerful electromagnets in the walls, attracting and releasing it as he moved. It hardly moved when he wasn't trying to catch it, but then it darted about like a live thing.

He tried to control the man handling it but that didn't work. Dr. Shumaker was doing it himself. The test was nicely balanced. An ordinary man would never catch the key at all. It was Shumaker against Uncle Elliot. The mechanics of the thing put a slight advantage on Uncle Elliot's side. But his physical responses had to be very nearly as rapid and as completely controlled as Shumaker's before he won.

Uncle Elliot identified the operator, or guesed who he was, made another furious mental stab at Shumaker and at the same time grabbed at the key. John and I grinned at each other delightedly.

For Shumaker it was like a game of chess. He was patient. We got stiff standing while Uncle Elliot tried to trap the key. Gradually his efforts improved but he didn't seem to notice that. He still didn't touch the key. Then after a while he began occasionally to touch it, but never grasp it. He couldn't get too close or the wire might swing into his face. He tried lying underneath the hanging key, but then it stayed beyond his reach.

At last he got the principle. His attempts had to force the key where he wanted it to go, in a co-ordinated pattern, so that he could catch it. After a few minutes of that he had it.

"All right," I whispered. "Let's go."

We made our way out of the hospital. "I wonder if we can take the risk," I murmured, "of going and telling Inspector Shaw that Uncle Elliot's going to be all right?"

"Suppose in an hour or two we have to explain why he's dead?" But John was grinning.

"Nobody every broke down as late as that," I said scornfully.

"You nearly did."

"Nearly isn't quite. Besides, I only looked a bit rocky."

John hooted derisively. "Say, John," I said. "How about our kids?"

That was one time when our minds didn't chime together. "Kids?" said John. "Well, what about them?"

"Are they going to be like us, fool?"

"Don't you believe what you're told?"

"Not always. I know they're supposed to be like us."

"Only one way to find out for sure. Have 'em and see."

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We were going to be married very soon. We didn't care what people thought; I didn't want to go back to the house alone, so John came with me. We knew we had about 48 hours to wait.

About 8 on the evening of the third day Inspector Shaw rang.

"Say, Miss Riley, Dr. Shumaker's just been on the phone to me. I guess he thinks I work twenty-four hours a day and my home is just an alternative police address."

"Yes, it's very inconsiderate," I agreed. "But what did he say?"

"Your uncle's okay, miss. The doctor says it wasn't the old trouble at all. Seems he must have hit his head the other day. Know anything about that?"

"Oh, he's always hitting his head. Nothing in that."

"Yes, but this time it left some pressure on the brain. A very small operation put it right, the doctor says. He'll be home later tonight."

I thanked him and hung up.

"My uncle's all right," I said contentedly. "Have you a gun?"

"A gun — why?" John demanded.

"For self-defence. He'll be after you with a shortgun when he finds out you've been here the last two nights."

John grinned. "He only has to look into my mind to see how nobly I've guarded your virtue."

"I like that!" I exclaimed. "How you've guarded my virtue! Why, if I hadn't —"

"Never mind that now," he said hastily.

A car dropped Uncle Elliot at the house about 10. We went out and led him inside. He looked as ungainly as ever. But that was deceptive.

"Now you're going straight to bed," I said soothingly, "and we'll come and tuck you in."

"No, you don't get away with that," he said grimly. He shot a questing thought at my mind.

"You mustn't do that," I said, shocked. "It isn't nice. In any case, it doesn't do you any good."

"The ethical and the practical, in words of one syllable," Uncle Elliot commented. "But look here, Junior —"

"Sit down and have some coffee," I said.

We all sat down. "Are you still wild at Dr. Shumaker?" John asked.

"No, I understand that now. I see a lot I didn't see before. But nobody told me anything and there are a lot of gaps. Never mind, you're going to fill them in for me, aren't you?"

"Oh, no," I said. "We're not going to tell you anything. Your companion is. They call themselves companions," I added as an explanatory footnote.

Uncle Elliot frowned terribly, as if he was trying to get his hair in his

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mouth. "But I thought I'd subdued the inhuman little devil," he said.

I shook my head. "You've got the wrong slant," I told him. "Let him talk to you. Tell us what he says. Sometimes something new comes out."

Uncle Elliot glanced at John for confirmation. John nodded.

"But why didn't it talk to me before, if it could?" Uncle Elliot demanded.

"Because it couldn't. It *can* only talk now. And it *will* talk only once. You have to let it. Concentrate on what it says."

He still wanted to argue. I never knew Uncle Elliot when he didn't. But I scowled at him ferociously and he realised he was only wasting time.

"*I can only speak*," said Uncle Elliot slowly, "*if you concentrate on the idea of a being which cannot exist as an individual.*"

He looked surprised, but interested.

"*To communicate with you at all I have to use your knowledge, your intelligence, and much of your memory. By your standards I have very little of any of these myself.*"

There was no trouble after that. Uncle Elliot was so curious that he forgot everything but the story that was being told in his own voice.

"You were afraid I should control you. I could never control any thinking being. For it is complete in itself, and I am nothing until I am part of it. Then I am two talents, about which you already know. I am a part of you as your hand is a part of you. Are you afraid that some night as you are sleeping your hand will find a knife and cut your throat?

"You see, even how I express myself is dependent on you. I use your memories, your examples and your imagery. Now help me still more, for I want to tell you how and why I came here, and that is very difficult. It will be all I can do to remember, without trying to help you to interpret."

John and I became more attentive. The story was never quite the same, and occasionally a new idea was expressed or remembered.

"We lived for a long time as companions of the Emirene" (the name was always slightly different, depending on the individual interpreting) "on their world many light-years from here. We were more essential to them than we are to you, for without us they would have had no method of communication among themselves. Perhaps, however, they once had a method of communication and suspended it when we became their companions.

"We had almost forgotten we were a separate species. We cannot reproduce ourselves. We can only be reproduced in and by our hosts, by an automatic modification of the genes. But the Emirene, a very intelligent race, had not forgotten.

"They discovered a long time before it happened that an alteration in

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their sun was going to destroy their planet. They accepted that fatalistically. I cannot explain the Emirene to you. They could have built ships and gone elsewhere, but it was not even considered. They loved their world in such a way that existence anywhere else was unthinkable for them.

"They accepted extinction long before it came. You will not understand that, but they had other feelings which you can understand. One was gratitude to us, and the understanding that while they were not adaptable, we were. They didn't ask us if we wished to leave them, for it would have been impossible for us to say yes while we were their companions. They planned our future for us.

"Light and radio and thought waves all travel at the same speed. Together we and the Emirene investigated and tabulated all the available thought waves reaching our world. The Emirene selected you. Of all the races we investigated you would gain most from our presence. You were intelligent, but psychotic to a high degree. You had the capacity for telepathy, but would not learn to use it for centuries. Remember that the thoughts that reached us were those of the nineteenth century on Earth.

"The Emirene built a ship. It could never have landed on Earth. I don't know why, but the Emirene did. It was packed with millions of containers, each holding one of us in a kind of suspended animation. Some of us remained behind. It was impossible to abandon the Emirene utterly. Those of us in the containers were incapable of anything but making the first possible host accept us as companions. When we are not fulfilling our natural function as companions, we cannot live and we cannot die.

"Just before the world was destroyed, two of the Emirene piloted the ship away from it. I cannot make you understand the sacrifice of those two. To go with us in the ship was terror, misery and anguish. Think of a human being volunteering, if it were possible, for death by torture lasting three hundred years, and you have some idea of what the Emirene did for us.

"The journey, as I have implied, lasted three hundred years. Then we were dropped all over your world, never in cities but always near them. Then, though we know nothing of that, the two Emirene who had outlived their world were free at last to die.

"When we are without a host we send out automatically a plea to all intelligent creatures. Thus you found me in six feet of rock.

"There is only one thing more. I told you we have next to no memory. Now that I have transferred what I have just told you to yours, I have released my hold on it. I can never communicate with you again, for I shall have nothing to say.

"Thank you, Elliot Riley, for accepting me as your companion. You have done that, you know. You have made me a part of you."

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That was all. Instantly Uncle Elliot became himself — eager, inquisitive. "Anything new?" he demanded.

"No," I told him regretfully. "I think we've got all we're going to get."

"We need a word for the second talent," said Uncle Elliot thoughtfully. "The first is telepathy, but the second . . . ?"

"Co-ordination," John suggested. "The companion welds your abilities into a unit so that you can't do wrongly what you can do at all."

"So they weren't conquerors. But what happened to Tom Berry?"

"Do you remember the parable of the talents?" I asked quietly. "The servant who was given one talent went and buried it in the earth. He didn't use it. He was afraid to use it. So was Tom Berry. He fought his companion. He lost his sanity fighting it. He wouldn't let it use his intelligence and his knowledge. He thought he was possessed and he wanted nothing but release. What could we do? He was mad, holding his companion trapped, unable to help him or leave him. We could do nothing but what we did. That was what Tom Berry wanted. You were different. You hadn't leisure to go mad. You had to let your companion help you or die. You see?"

"New talents," Uncle Elliot murmured. "They'll make a difference."

That was so much of an understatement that we lost our seriousness. It was only going to put us forward about a thousand years. Remove all aberration, in time. Make it possible for us to understand, as the Emirene had understood, races who lived light centuries away. Find out once and for all, as we were very soon going to find out, without building spaceships, whether there was life on Mars. . . .

"Yes," I admitted. "I think that's a reasonable working hypothesis, until we find a better one."

Note:

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As told to the congregation of the Anglers' Rest, the exploits of that uncounted tribe, the Mulliners, have ranged from political and social misadventure to an occasional brush with the supernatural. Here is the story of grim Bludleigh Court and the awful effect that stately home of England had on Mr. Mulliner's niece Charlotte, on her poetry and on the course of her true love. (Mr. Mulliner also contributes some invaluable hints on potting gnus, plus an occasional note on stalking the wapiti.) It is one of the better efforts of the chronicler of the clan Mulliner and one more item of the great debt we owe his Boswell and (presumably) literary agent, a certain Mr. P. G. Wodehouse.

Unpleasantness at Bludleigh Court

by P. G. WODEHOUSE

THE POET who was spending the summer at the Anglers' Rest had just begun to read us his new sonnet-sequence when the door of the bar-parlour opened and there entered a young man in gaiters. He came quickly in and ordered beer. In one hand he was carrying a double-barrelled gun, in the other a posy of dead rabbits. These he dropped squashily to the floor: and the poet, stopping in mid-sentence, took one long, earnest look at the remains. Then, wincing painfully, he turned a light green and closed his eyes. It was not until the banging of the door announced the visitor's departure that he came to life again.

Mr. Mulliner regarded him sympathetically over his hot scotch and lemon.

"You appear upset," he said.

"A little," admitted the poet. "A momentary malaise. It may be a purely personal prejudice, but I confess to preferring rabbits with rather more of their contents inside them."

"Many sensitive souls in your line of business hold similar views," Mr. Mulliner assured him. "My niece Charlotte did."

"It is my temperament," said the poet. "I dislike all dead things — particularly when, as in the case of the above rabbits, they have so ob-

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viously, so — shall I say? — blatantly made the Great Change. Give me," he went on, the greenish tinge fading from his face, "life and joy and beauty."

"Just what my niece Charlotte used to say."

"Oddly enough, that thought forms the theme of the second sonnet in my sequence — which, now that the young gentleman with the portable morgue has left us, I will . . ."

"My niece Charlotte," said Mr. Mulliner, with quiet firmness, "was one of those gentle, dreamy, wistful girls who take what I have sometimes felt to be a mean advantage of having an ample private income to write Vignettes in Verse for the artistic weeklies. Charlotte's Vignettes in Verse had a wide vogue among the editors of London's higher-browed but less prosperous periodicals. Directly these frugal men realized that she was willing to supply unstinted Vignettes gratis, for the mere pleasure of seeing herself in print, they were all over her. The consequence was that before long she had begun to move freely in the most refined literary circles; and one day, at a little luncheon at the Crushed Pansy (The Restaurant With A Soul), she found herself seated next to a godlike young man at the sight of whom something seemed to go off inside her like a spring."

"Talking of spring . . ." said the poet.

"Cupid," proceeded Mr. Mulliner, "has always found the family to which I belong a ready mark for his bow. Our hearts are warm, our passions quick. It is not too much to say that my niece Charlotte was in love with this young man before she had finished spearing the first anchovy out of the hors d'oeuvres dish. He was intensely spiritual-looking, with a broad, white forehead and eyes that seemed to Charlotte not so much eyes as a couple of holes punched in the surface of a beautiful soul. He wrote, she learned, Pastels in Prose; and his name, if she had caught it correctly at the moment of their introduction, was Aubrey Trefusis.

Friendship ripens quickly at the Crushed Pansy. The *poulet rôti au cresson* had scarcely been distributed before the young man was telling Charlotte his hopes, his fears, and the story of his boyhood. And she was amazed to find that he sprang — not from a long line of artists but from an ordinary, conventional county family of the type that cares for nothing except hunting and shooting.

"You can readily imagine," he said, helping her to Brussels sprouts, "how intensely such an environment jarred upon my unfolding spirit. My family are greatly respected in the neighbourhood, but I personally have always looked upon them as a gang of blood-imbrued plug-uglies. My views on kindness to animals are rigid. My impulse, on encountering a rabbit, is to offer it lettuce. To my family, on the other hand, a rabbit

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seems incomplete without a deposit of small shot in it. My father, I believe, has cut off more assorted birds in their prime than any other man in the Midlands. A whole morning was spoiled for me last week by the sight of a photograph of him in the *Tatler*, looking rather severely at a dying duck. My elder brother Reginald spreads destruction in every branch of the animal kingdom. And my younger brother Wilfred is, I understand, working his way up to the larger fauna by killing sparrows with an air-gun. Spiritually, one might just as well live in Chicago as at Bludleigh Court."

"Bludleigh Court?" cried Charlotte.

"The moment I was twenty-one and came into a modest but sufficient inheritance, I left the place and went to London to lead the life literary. The family, of course, were appalled. My uncle Francis, I remember, tried to reason with me for hours. Uncle Francis, you see, used to be a famous big-game hunter. They tell me he has shot more gnus than any other man who ever went to Africa. In fact, until recently he virtually never stopped shooting gnus. Now, I hear, he has developed lumbago and is down at Bludleigh treating it with Riggs's Superfine Emulsion and sun-baths."

"But is Bludleigh Court your home?"

"That's right. Bludleigh Court, Lesser Bludleigh, near Goresby-on-the-Ouse, Bedfordshire."

"But Bludleigh Court belongs to Sir Alexander Bassinger."

"My name is really Bassinger. I adopted the pen-name of Trefusis to spare the family's feelings. But how do you come to know of the place?"

"I'm going down there next week for a visit. My mother was an old friend of Lady Bassinger."

Aubrey was astonished. And, being, like all writers of Pastels in Prose, a neat phrasemaker, he said what a small world it was, after all.

"Well, well, well!" he said.

"From what you tell me," said Charlotte, "I'm afraid I shall not enjoy my visit. If there's one thing I loathe, it's anything connected with sport."

"Two minds with but a single thought," said Aubrey. "Look here, I'll tell you what. I haven't been near Bludleigh for years, but if you're going there, why, dash it, I'll come too — aye, even though it means meeting my uncle Francis."

"You will?"

"I certainly will. I don't consider it safe that a girl of your exquisite refinement and sensibility should be dumped down at an abattoir like Bludleigh Court without a kindred spirit to lend her moral stability."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you." His voice was grave. "That house exercises a spell."

"A what?"

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"A spell. A ghastly spell that saps the strongest humanitarian principles. Who knows what effect it might have upon you, should you go there without someone like me to stand by you and guide you in your hour of need?"

"What nonsense!"

"Well, all I can tell you is that once, when I was a boy, a high official of Our Dumb Brothers' League of Mercy arrived there lateish on a Friday night, and at 2:15 on the Saturday afternoon he was the life and soul of an informal party got up for the purpose of drawing one of the local badgers out of an upturned barrel."

Charlotte laughed merrily.

"The spell will not affect me," she said.

"Nor me, of course," said Aubrey. "But all the same, I would prefer to be by your side, if you don't mind."

"Mind, Mr. Bassinger!" breathed Charlotte softly, and was thrilled to note that at the words and the look with which she accompanied them this man to whom — for, as I say, we Mulliners are quick workers — she had already given her heart, quivered violently. It seemed to her that in those soulful eyes of his she had seen the lovelight.

Bludleigh Court, when Charlotte reached it some days later, proved to be a noble old pile of Tudor architecture, situated in rolling parkland and flanked by pleasant gardens leading to a lake with a tree-fringed boathouse. Inside, it was comfortably furnished and decorated throughout with groves of glass cases containing the goggle-eyed remnants of birds and beasts assassinated at one time or another by Sir Alexander Bassinger and his son, Reginald. From every wall there peered down with an air of mild reproach selected portions of the gnus, moose, elks, zebus, antelopes, giraffes, mountain goats and wapiti which had had the misfortune to meet Colonel Sir Francis Pashley-Drake before lumbago spoiled him for the chase. The cemetery also included a few stuffed sparrows, which showed that little Wilfred was doing his bit.

The first two days of her visit Charlotte passed mostly in the society of Colonel Pashley-Drake, the uncle Francis to whom Aubrey had alluded. He seemed to have taken a paternal fancy to her: and, lithely though she dodged down back-stairs and passages, she generally found him breathing heavily at her side. He was a red-faced, almost circular man, with eyes like a prawn's, and he spoke to her freely of lumbago, gnus and Aubrey.

"So you're a friend of my young nephew?" he said, snorting twice in a rather unpleasant manner. It was plain that he disapproved of the pastel-artist. "Shouldn't see too much of him, if I were you. Not the sort of fellow I'd like any daughter of mine to get friendly with."

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"You are quite wrong," said Charlotte warmly. "You have only to gaze into Mr. Bassinger's eyes to see that his morals are above reproach."

"I never gaze into his eyes," replied Colonel Pashley-Drake. "Don't like his eyes. Wouldn't gaze into them if you paid me. I maintain his whole outlook on life is morbid and unwholesome. I like a man to be a clean, strong, upstanding Englishman who can look his gnu in the face and put an ounce of lead in it."

"Life," said Charlotte coldly, "is not all gnus."

"You imply that there are also wapiti, moose, zebus and mountain-goats?" said Sir Francis. "Well, maybe you're right. All the same, I'd give the fellow a wide berth, if I were you."

"So far from doing so," replied Charlotte proudly, "I am about to go for a stroll with him by the lake at this very moment."

And, turning away with a petulant toss of her head, she moved off to meet Aubrey, who was hurrying towards her across the terrace.

"I am so glad you came, Mr. Bassinger," she said to him as they walked together in the direction of the lake. "I was beginning to find your uncle Francis a little excessive."

Aubrey nodded sympathetically. He had observed her in conversation with his relative and his heart had gone out to her.

"Two minutes of my uncle Francis," he said, "is considered by the best judges a good medium dose for an adult. So you find him trying, eh? I was wondering what impression my family had made on you."

Charlotte was silent for a moment.

"How relative everything is in this world," she said pensively. "When I first met your father, I thought I had never seen anybody more completely loathsome. Then I was introduced to your brother Reginald, and I realized that, after all, your father might have been considerably worse. And, just as I was thinking that Reginald was the furthest point possible, along came your uncle Francis, and Reginald's quiet charm seemed to leap out at me like a beacon on a dark night. Tell me," she said, "has no one ever thought of doing anything about your uncle Francis?"

Aubrey shook his head gently.

"It is pretty generally recognised now that he is beyond the reach of human science. The only thing to do seems to be to let him go on till he eventually runs down."

They sat together on a rustic bench overlooking the water. It was a lovely morning. The sun shone on the little wavelets which the sighing breeze drove gently to the shore. A dreamy stillness had fallen on the world, broken only by the distant sound of Sir Alexander Bassinger murdering magpies, of Reginald Bassinger encouraging dogs to eviscerate a rabbit, of

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Wilfred busy among the sparrows, and a monotonous droning noise from the upper terrace, which was Colonel Sir Francis Pashley-Drake telling Lady Bassinger what to do with the dead gnu.

Aubrey was the first to break the silence.

"How lovely the world is, Miss Mulliner."

"Yes, isn't it!"

"How softly the breeze caresses yonder water."

"Yes, doesn't it!"

"How fragrant a scent of wild flowers it has."

"Yes, hasn't it!"

They were silent again.

"On such a day," said Aubrey, "the mind seems to turn irresistibly to Love."

"Love?" said Charlotte, her heart begining to flutter.

"Love," said Aubrey. "Tell me, Miss Mulliner, have you ever thought of Love?"

He took her hand. Her head was bent, and with the toe of her dainty shoe she toyed with a passing snail.

"Life, Miss Mulliner," said Aubrey, "is a Sahara through which we all must pass. We start at the Cairo of the cradle and we travel on to the — er — well, we go travelling on."

"Yes, don't we!" said Charlotte.

"Afar we can see the distant goal . . ."

"Yes, can't we!"

". . . and would fain reach it."

"Yes, wouldn't we!"

"But the way is rough and weary. We have to battle through the sandstorm of Destiny, face with what courage we may the howling simoons of Fate. And very unpleasant it all is. But sometimes in the Sahara of Life, if we are fortunate, we come upon the Oasis of Love. That oasis, when I had all but lost hope, I reached at one-fifteen on the afternoon of Tuesday, the twenty-second of last month. There comes a time in the life of every man when he sees Happiness beckoning to him and must grasp it. Miss Mulliner, I have something to ask you which I have been trying to ask ever since the day when we two first met. Miss Mulliner . . . Charlotte . . . Will you be my . . . Gosh! Look at that whacking great rat! Loo-loo-loo-loo-loo-loo-loo-loo!" said Aubrey, changing the subject.

Once, in her childhood, a sportive playmate had secretly withdrawn the chair on which Charlotte Mulliner was preparing to seat herself. Years had passed, but the recollection of the incident remained green in her memory. In frosty weather she could still feel the old wound. And now, as Aubrey

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Bassinger suddenly behaved in this remarkable manner, she experienced the same sensation again. It was as though something blunt and heavy had hit her on the head at the exact moment when she was slipping on a banana-skin.

She stared round-eyed at Aubrey. He had released her hand, sprung to his feet, and now, armed with her parasol, was beating furiously in the lush grass at the waterside. And every little while his mouth would open, his head would go back, and uncouth sounds would proceed from his slavering jaws.

"Yoicks! Yoicks! Yoicks!" cried Aubrey.

And again,

"Tally-ho! Hard For'ard! Tally-ho!"

Presently the fever seemed to pass. He straightened himself and came back to where she stood.

"It must have got away into a hole or something," he said, removing a bead of perspiration from his forehead with the ferrule of the parasol. "The fact of the matter is, it's silly ever to go out in the country without a good dog. If only I'd had a nice, nippy terrier with me, I might have obtained some solid results. As it is, a fine rat — gone — just like that! Oh, well, that's Life, I suppose." He paused. "Let me see," he said. "Where was I?"

And then it was as though he waked from a trance. His flushed face paled.

"I say," he stammered, "I'm afraid you must think me most awfully rude."

"Pray do not mention it," said Charlotte coldly.

"Oh, but you must. Dashing off like that."

"Not at all."

"What I was going to say, when I was interrupted, was, will you be my wife?"

"Oh?"

"Yes."

"Well, I won't."

"You won't?"

"No. Never." Charlotte's voice was tense with a scorn which she did not attempt to conceal. "So this is what you were all the time, Mr. Bassinger — a secret sportsman!"

Aubrey quivered from head to foot.

"I'm not. I'm not! It was the hideous spell of this ghastly house that overcame me."

"Pah!"

"What did you say?"

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"I said 'Pah'?"

"Why did you say 'Pah'?"

"Because," said Charlotte, with flashing eyes, "I do not believe you. Your story is thin and fishy."

"But it's the truth. It was as if some hypnotic influence had gripped me, forcing me to act against all my higher inclinations. Can't you understand? Would you condemn me for a moment's passing weakness? Do you think," he cried passionately, "that the real Aubrey Bassinger would raise a hand to touch a rat, save in the way of kindness? I love rats, I tell you — love them. I used to keep them as a boy. White ones with pink eyes."

Charlotte shook her head. Her face was cold and hard.

"Good-bye, Mr. Bassinger," she said. "From this instant we meet as strangers."

She turned and was gone. And Aubrey Bassinger, covering his face with his hands, sank on the bench, feeling like a sand-bagged leper.

The mind of Charlotte Mulliner, in the days which followed the painful scene which I have just described, was torn, as you may well imagine, with conflicting emotions. For a time, as was natural, anger predominated. But after awhile sadness overcame indignation. She mourned for her lost happiness.

And yet, she asked herself, how else could she have acted? She had worshipped Aubrey Bassinger. She had set him upon a pedestal, looked up to him as a great white soul. She had supposed him one who lived, far above this world's coarseness and grime, on a rarified plane of his own, thinking beautiful thoughts. Instead of which, it now appeared, he went about the place chasing rats with parasols. What could she have done but spurn him?

That there lurked in the atmosphere of Bludleigh Court a sinister influence that sapped the principles of the most humanitarian and sent them ravening to and fro, seeking for prey, she declined to believe. The theory was pure banana-oil. If such an influence was in operation at Bludleigh, why had it not affected her?

No, if Aubrey Bassinger chased rats with parasols, it could only mean that he was one of Nature's rat-chasers. And to such a one, cost what it might to refuse, she could never confide her heart.

Few things are more embarrassing to a highly-strung girl than to be for any length of time in the same house with a man whose love she has been compelled to decline, and Charlotte would have given much to be able to leave Bludleigh Court. But there was, it seemed, to be a garden-party on the following Tuesday, and Lady Bassinger had urged her so strongly to stay on for it that departure was out of the question.

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To fill the leaden moments, she immersed herself in her work. She had a long-standing commission to supply the *Animal-Lovers Gazette* with a poem for its Christmas number, and to the task of writing this she proceeded to devote herself. And gradually the ecstasy of literary composition eased her pain.

The days crept by. Old Sir Alexander continued to maltreat magpies. Reginald and the local rabbits fought a never-ceasing battle, they striving to keep up the birthrate, he to reduce it. Colonel Pashley-Drake maundered on about gnus he had met. And Aubrey dragged himself about the house, looking licked to a splinter. Eventually Tuesday came, and with it the garden-party.

Lady Bassinger's annual garden party was one of the big events of the countryside. By 4 o'clock all that was bravest and fairest for miles around had assembled on the big lawn. But Charlotte, though she had stayed on specially to be present, was not one of the gay throng. At about the time when the first strawberry was being dipped in its cream, she was up in her room, staring with bewildered eyes at a letter which had arrived by the second post.

The *Animal-Lovers Gazette* had turned her poem down!

Yes, turned it down flat, in spite of the fact that it had been commissioned, and that she was not asking a penny for it. Accompanying the rejected manuscript was a curt note from the editor, in which he said that he feared its tone might offend his readers.

Charlotte was stunned. She was not accustomed to having her efforts rejected. This one, moreover, had seemed to her so particularly good. A hard judge of her own work, she had said to herself, as she licked the envelope, that this time, if never before, she had delivered the goods.

She unfolded the manuscript and re-read it.

It ran as follows:

GOOD GNUS

(*A Vignette in Verse*)

BY

CHARLOTTE MULLINER

When cares attack and life seems black,
How sweet it is to pot a yak,

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Or puncture hares and grizzly bears,
And others I could mention:
But in my Animals' "Who's Who"
No name stands higher than the Gnu:
And each new gnu that comes in view
Receives my prompt attention.

When Afric's sun is sinking low,
And shadows wander to and fro,
And everywhere there's in the air
A hush that's deep and solemn;
Then is the time good men and true
With View Halloo pursue the gnu:
(The safest spot to put your shot
Is through the spinal column).

To take the creature by surprise
We must adopt some rude disguise,
Although deceit is never sweet,
And falsehoods don't attract us:
So, as with gun in hand you wait,
Remember to impersonate
A tuft of grass, a mountain-pass,
A kopje or a cactus.

A brief suspense, and then at last
The waiting's o'er, the vigil past:
A careful aim. A spurt of flame.
It's done. You've pulled the trigger,
And one more gnu, so fair and frail,
Has handed in its dinner-pail:
(The females all are rather small,
The males are somewhat bigger).

Charlotte laid the manuscript down, frowning. She chafed at the imbecility of editors. Less than ever was she able to understand what anyone could find in it to cavil at. Tone likely to offend? What did the man mean about the tone being likely to offend? She had never heard such nonsense in her life. How could the tone possibly offend? It was unexceptional. The whole poem breathed that clean, wholesome, healthy spirit of Sport which has made England what it is. And the thing was not only lyrically perfect,

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but educational as well. It told the young reader, anxious to shoot gnus but uncertain of the correct procedure, exactly what he wanted to know.

She bit her lip. Well, if this Animal-Lovers bird didn't know a red-hot contribution when he saw one, she would jolly well find somebody else who did — and quick, too. She . . .

At this moment, something occurred to distract her thoughts. Down on the terrace below, little Wilfred, complete with airgun, had come into her line of vision. The boy was creeping along in a quiet, purposeful manner, obviously intent on the chase: and it suddenly came over Charlotte Mulliner in a wave that here she had been in this house all this time and never once had thought of borrowing the child's weapon and having a plug at something with it.

The sky was blue. The sun was shining. All Nature seemed to call to her to come out and kill things.

She left the room and ran quickly down the stairs.

And what of Aubrey, meanwhile? Grief having slowed him up on his feet, he had been cornered by his mother and marched off to hand cucumber sandwiches at the garden-party. After a brief spell of servitude, however, he had contrived to escape and was wandering on the terrace, musing mournfully, when he observed his brother Wilfred approaching. And at the same moment Charlotte Mulliner emerged from the house and came hurrying in their direction. In a flash, Aubrey perceived that here was a situation which, shrewdly handled, could be turned greatly to his advantage. Affecting to be unaware of Charlotte's approach, he stopped his brother and eyed the young thug sternly.

"Wilfred," he said, "where are you going with that gun?"

The boy appeared embarrassed.

"Just shooting."

Aubrey took the weapon from him and raised his voice slightly. Out of the corner of his eye he had seen that Charlotte was now well within hearing.

"Shooting, eh?" he said. "Shooting? I see. And have you never been taught, wretched child, that you should be kind to the animals that crave your compassion? Has no one ever told you that he prayeth best who loveth best all things both great and small? For shame, Wilfred, for shame!"

Charlotte had come up, and was standing there, looking at them inquiringly.

"What's all this about?" she asked.

Aubrey started dramatically.

"Miss Mulliner! I was not aware that you were there. All this? Oh,

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nothing. I found this lad here on his way to shoot sparrows with his airgun, and I am taking the thing from him. It may seem to you a high-handed action on my part. You may consider me hyper-sensitive. You may ask, Why all this fuss about a few birds? But that is Aubrey Bassinger. Aubrey Bassinger will not lightly allow even the merest sparrow to be placed in jeopardy. Tut, Wilfred," he said. "Tut! Cannot you see now how wrong it is to shoot the poor sparrows?"

"But I wasn't going to shoot sparrows," said the boy. "I was going to shoot Uncle Francis while he is having his sun-bath."

"It is also wrong," said Aubrey, after a slight hesitation, "to shoot Uncle Francis while he is having his sun-bath."

Charlotte Mulliner uttered an impatient exclamation. And Aubrey, looking at her, saw that her eyes were glittering with a strange light. She breathed quickly through her delicately-chiselled nose. She seemed feverish, and a medical man would have been concerned about her blood-pressure.

"Why?" she demanded vehemently. "Why is it wrong? Why shouldn't he shoot his uncle Francis while he is having his sun-bath?"

Aubrey stood for a moment, pondering. Her razor-like feminine intelligence had cut cleanly to the core of the matter. After all, now that she put it like that, why not?

"Think how it would tickle him up."

"True," said Aubrey, nodding. "True."

"And his uncle Francis is precisely the sort of man who ought to have been shot at with air-guns incessantly for the last thirty years. The moment I met him, I said to myself, 'That man ought to be shot at with air-guns.' "

Aubrey nodded again. Her girlish enthusiasm had begun to infect him.

"There is much in what you say," he admitted.

"Where is he?" asked Charlotte, turning to the boy.

"On the roof of the boathouse."

Charlotte's face clouded.

"H'm!" she said. "That's awkward. How is one to get at him?"

"I remember Uncle Francis telling me once," said Aubrey, "that, when you went shooting tigers, you climbed a tree. There are plenty of trees by the boathouse."

"Admirable!"

For an instant there came to disturb Aubrey's hearty joy in the chase a brief, faint flicker of prudence.

"But . . . I say . . . Do you really think . . . Ought we . . . ?"

Charlotte's eyes flashed scornfully.

"Infirm of purpose," she said. "Give me the air-gun!"

"I was only thinking . . . "

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"Well?"

"I suppose you know he'll have practically nothing on?"

Charlotte Mulliner laughed lightly.

"He can't intimidate *me*," she said. "Come! Let us be going."

Up on the roof of the boathouse, the beneficent ultra-violet rays of the afternoon sun pouring down on his globular surface, Colonel Sir Francis Pashley-Drake lay in that pleasant half-waking, half-dreaming state that accompanies this particular form of lumbago-treatment. His mind flitted lightly from one soothing subject to another. He thought of elks he had shot in Canada, of moufflon he had shot in the Grecian Archipelago, of giraffes he had shot in Nigeria. He was just on the point of thinking of a hippopotamus which he had shot in Egypt, when the train of his meditations was interrupted by a soft popping sound not far away. He smiled affectionally. So little Wilfred was out with his air-gun, eh?

A thrill of quiet pride passed through Colonel Pashley-Drake. He had trained the lad well, he felt. With a garden-party in progress, with all the opportunities it offered for quiet gorging, how many boys of Wilfred's age would have neglected their shooting to hang round the tea-table and stuff themselves with cakes. But this fine lad . . .

Ping! There it was again. The boy must be somewhere quite close at hand. He wished he could be at his side, giving him kindly advice. Wilfred, he felt, was a young fellow after his own heart. What destruction he would spread among the really worthwhile animals when he grew up and put aside childish things and exchanged his air-gun for a Winchester repeater.

Sir Francis Pashley-Drake started. Two inches from where he lay a splinter of wood had sprung from the boathouse roof. He sat up, feeling a little less affectionate.

"Wilfred!"

There was no reply.

"Be careful, Wilfred, my boy. You nearly . . ."

A sharp, agonizing twinge caused him to break off abruptly. He sprang to his feet and began to address the surrounding landscape passionately in one of the lesser-known dialects of the Congo basin. He no longer thought of Wilfred with quiet pride. Few things so speedily modify an uncle's love as a nephew's air-gun bullet in the fleshy part of the leg. Sir Francis Pashley-Drake's plans for this boy's future had undergone in one brief instant a complete change. He no longer desired to stand beside him through his formative years, teaching him the secrets of shikarri. All he wanted to do was to get close enough to him to teach him with the flat of his right hand to be a bit more careful where he pointed his gun.

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He was expressing a synopsis of these views in a mixture of Urdu and Cape Dutch, when the words were swept from his lips by the sight of a woman's face, peering from the branches of a near-by tree.

Colonel Pashley-Drake reeled where he stood. Like so many out-door men, he was the soul of modesty. Once, in Bechuanaland, he had left a native witch-dance in a marked manner because he considered the chief's third supplementary wife insufficiently clad. An acute consciousness of the sketchiness of his costume overcame him. He blushed brightly.

"My dear young lady . . . . " he stammered.

He had got thus far when he perceived that the young woman was aiming at him something that looked remarkably like an air-gun. Her tongue protruding thoughtfully from the corner of her mouth, and had closed one eye and with the other was squinting tensely along the barrel.

Colonel Sir Francis Pashley-Drake did not linger. In all England there was probably no man more enthusiastic about shooting; but the fascination of shooting as a sport depends almost wholly on whether you are at the right or wrong end of the gun. With an agility which no gnu, unless in the very pink of condition, could have surpassed, he sprang to the side of the roof and leaped off. There was a clump of reeds not far from the boathouse. He galloped across the turf and dived into them.

Charlotte descended from her tree. Her expression was petulant. Girls nowadays are spoiled, and only too readily become peevish when baulked of their pleasures.

"I had no idea he was so nippy," she said.

"A quick mover," agreed Aubrey. "I imagine he got that way from dodging rhinoceroses."

"Why can't they make these silly guns with two barrels? A single barrel doesn't give a girl a chance."

Nestling among the reeds, Colonel Sir Francis Pashley-Drake, in spite of the indignation natural to a man in his position, could not help feeling a certain complacency. The old woodcraft of the hunter had stood him, he felt, in good stead. Not many men, he told himself, would have had the initiative and swift intelligence to act so promptly in the face of peril.

He was aware of voices close by.

"What do we do now?" he heard Charlotte Mulliner say.

"We must think," said the voice of his nephew Aubrey.

"He's in there somewhere."

"Yes."

"I hate to see a fine head like that get away," said Charlotte, and her voice was still querulous. "Especially after I winged him. The very next poem I write is going to be an appeal to air-gun manufacturers to use their

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intelligence, if they have any, and turn out a line with two barrels."

"I shall write a Pastel in Prose on the same subject," agreed Aubrey.

There was a short silence. An insect of unknown species crept up Colonel Pashley-Drake and bit him in the small of the back.

"I'll tell you what," said Aubrey. "I remember Uncle Francis mentioning to me once that when wounded zebus take cover by the reaches of the Lower Zambesi, the sportsman despatches a native assistant to set fire to . . ."

Sir Francis Pashley-Drake emitted a hollow groan. It was drowned by Charlotte's cry of delight.

"Why, of course! How clever you are, Mr. Bassinger."

"Oh no," said Aubrey modestly.

"Have you matches?"

"I have a cigarette-lighter."

"Then would it be bothering you too much to go and set light to those reeds — about there would be a good place — and I'll wait here with the gun."

"I should be charmed."

"I hate to trouble you."

"No trouble, I assure you," said Aubrey. "A pleasure."

Three minutes later the revellers on the lawn were interested to observe a sight rare at the better class of English garden-party. Out of a clump of laurel-bushes that bordered the smoothly mown turf there came charging a stout, pink gentleman of middle age who hopped from side to side as he ran. He was wearing a loin-cloth, and seemed in a hurry. They had just time to recognize in this newcomer their hostess's brother, Colonel Sir Francis Pashley-Drake, when he snatched a cloth from the nearest table, draped it round him, and with a quick leap took refuge behind the portly form of the Bishop of Stortford, who was talking to the local Master of Hounds about the difficulty he had in keeping his vicars off the incense.

Charlotte and Aubrey had paused in the shelter of the laurels. Aubrey, peering through this zareba, clicked his tongue regretfully.

"He's taken cover again," he said. "I'm afraid we shall find it difficult to dig him out of there. He's gone to earth behind a bishop."

Receiving no reply, he turned.

"Miss Mulliner!" he exclaimed. "Charlotte! What is the matter?"

A strange change had come over the girl's beautiful face since he had last gazed at it. The fire had died out of those lovely eyes, leaving them looking like those of a newly awakened somnambulist. She was pale, and the tip of her nose quivered.

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"Where am I?" she murmured.

"Bludleigh Manor, Lesser Bludleigh, Goresby-on-the-Ouse, Bedfordshire. Telephone 28 Goresby," said Aubrey quickly.

"Have I been dreaming? Or did I really . . . Ah, yes, yes!" she moaned, shuddering violently. "It comes back. I shot Sir Francis with the air-gun!"

"You certainly did," said Aubrey, and would have gone on to comment with warm approbation on the skill she had shown, a skill which — in an untrained novice — had struck him as really remarkable. But he checked himself. "Surely," he said, "you are not letting the fact disturb you? It's the sort of thing that might have happened to anyone."

She interrupted him.

"How right you were, Mr. Bassinger, to warn me against the spell of Bludleigh. And how wrong I was to blame you for borrowing my parasol to chase a rat. Can you ever forgive me?"

"Charlotte!"

"Hush!" she said. "Listen."

On the lawn, Sir Francis Pashley-Drake was telling his story to an enthralled audience. The sympathy of the meeting, it was only too plain, was entirely with him. This shooting of a sitting sun-bather had stirred the feelings of his hearers deeply. Indignant exclamations came faintly to the ears of the young couple in the laurels.

"Most irregular!"

"Not done!"

"Scarcely cricket!"

And then, from Sir Alexander Bassinger, a stern "I shall require a full explanation."

Charlotte turned to Aubrey.

"What shall we do?"

"Well," said Aubrey, reflecting, "I don't think we had better just go and join the party and behave as if nothing had happened. The atmosphere doesn't seem right. What I would propose is that we take a short cut through the fields to the station, hook up with the 5:50 express at Goresby, go to London, have a bit of dinner, get married and . . ."

"Yes, yes," cried Charlotte. "Take me away from this awful house."

"To the ends of the world," said Aubrey fervently. He paused. "Look here," he said suddenly. "If you move over to where I'm standing, you get the old boy plumb spang against the sky-line. You wouldn't care for just one last . . ."

"No, no!"

"Merely a suggestion," said Aubrey. "Ah well, perhaps you're right. Then let's be shifting."

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Wherein my perceptive fellow-member of the Société des Gentilshommes Chefs de Cuisine records the noble achievement of one of our greatest — and hitherto most neglected — ancestors. J. F. McC.

The First

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

"He was a bold man," wrote Dean Swift, "that first eat an oyster." A man, I might add, to whom civilization owes an enormous debt — were it not that any debt was quite canceled by that moment of ecstasy which he was first of all men to know.

And countless other such epic figures there have been, pioneers whose achievements are comparable to the discovery of fire and possibly superior to the invention of the wheel and the arch.

But none of these discoveries (save perhaps that of the oyster) could have its full value for us today but for one other, even more momentous instant in the early history of Man.

This is the story of Sko.

Sko crouched at the mouth of his cave and glared at the stewpot. A full day's hunting it had taken him to get that sheep. Most of another day he had spent cooking the stew, while his woman cured the hide and tended the children and fed the youngest with the breast food that took no hunting. And now all of the family sat back there in the cave, growling with their mouths and growling with their bellies from hunger and hatred of the food and fear of the death that comes from no food, while only he ate the stewed sheep-meat.

It was tired and stale and flat in his mouth. He had reasons that made him eat, but he could not blame the family. Seven months and nothing but sheep. The birds had flown. Other years they came back; who knew if they would this year? Soon the fish would come up the river again, if this year was like others; but who could be sure?

And now whoever ate of the boars or of the rabbits died in time, and when the Ceremonial Cuts were made, strange worms appeared inside him. The Man of the Sun had said it was now a sin against the Sun to eat of

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the boar and of the rabbit; and clearly that was true, for sinners died.

Sheep or hunger. Sheep-meat or death. Sko chewed the tasteless chunk in his mouth and brooded. He could still force himself to eat; but his woman, his children, the rest of The People . . . You could see men's ribs now, and little children had big eyes and no cheeks and bellies like smooth round stones. Old men did not live so long as they used to; and even young men went to the Sun without wounds from man or beast to show Him. The food-that-takes-no-hunting was running thin and dry, and Sko could easily beat at wrestling the men who used to pound him down.

The People were his now because he could still eat; and because The People were his, he had to go on eating. And it was as if the Sun Himself demanded that he find a way to make The People eat too, eat themselves back into life.

Sko's stomach was full but his mouth still felt empty. There had once been a time when his stomach was empty and his mouth felt too full. He tried to remember. And then, as his tongue touched around his mouth trying for that feeling, the thought came.

It was the Dry Summer, when the river was low and all the springs had stopped living and men went toward the Sun's birth and the Sun's death to find new water. He was one of those who had found water; but he had been gone too long. He ate all the dried boarmeat he carried (it was not a sin then) and he shot all his arrows and still he was not home and needed to eat. So he ate growing things like the animals, and some of them were good. But he pulled from the ground one bulb which was in many small sections; and one of those sections, only one, filled his mouth with so much to taste so sharply that he could not stand it and drank almost all the water he was bringing back as proof. He could taste it still in his mind.

His hand groped into the hole at the side of the cave which was his own place. He found there the rest of that bulb which he had brought as a sign of the far place he had visited. He pulled the hard purple-brown skin off one yellow-white section and smelled it. Even the smell filled the mouth a little. He blew hard on the coals, and when the fire rose and the stewpot began to bubble, he dropped the section in with the sheep-meat. If one fills the stomach and not the mouth, the other the mouth and not the stomach, perhaps together . . .

Sko asked the Sun to make his guess be right, for The People. Then he let the pot bubble and thought nothing for a while. At last he roused and scooped a gobbet out of the stewpot and bit into it. His mouth filled a little, and something stirred in him and thought of another thing that filled the mouth.

He set off at a steady lope for the Licking Place which the tribe shared

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with the sheep and the other animals. He came back with a white crystal crust. He dropped this into the stewpot and stirred it with a stick and sat watching until he could not see the crust any more. Then he bit into another gobbet.

Now his mouth was indeed full. He opened it and from its fullness called into the cave the sound that meant *Food*. It was his woman who came out first. She saw the same old stewpot of sheep and started to turn, but he seized her and forced her mouth open and thrust in a gobbet of the new stew. She looked at him for a long silence. Then her jaws began to work fast and hard and not until there was nothing left to chew did she use the *Food* sound to call out the children.

There are other Licking Places to use, Sko thought while they ate; and runners can fetch more of the bulbs from where this one grew. There will be enough for The People . . . And then the pot was empty, and Sko Fyay and his family sat licking their fingers.

After a thousand generations of cooks, hunger and salt and garlic had combined to produce mankind's first chef.

A Child Terrible to Behold . . .

At Cracovia there was born of noble parents a child that was terrible to behold, with flaming and shining eyes, the mouth and nostrils were like to those of an ox; it had long horns, and a back hairy like a dog's; it had the faces of apes in the breast, where the teats should stand; it had cat's eyes under the navel, fastened to the hypogastrium, and they looked hideously and frightfully; it had the heads of dogs upon both elbows, and at the whirlbones of each knee, looking forward; it was splay-footed, splay-handed, the feet were like swan's feet, and it had a tail turned upwards that was crooked, about half an ell long. It lived four hours from the birth of it, and near its death spake thus: "Watch, for the Lord your God comes." "This was," saith Lycosthenes, "A.D. 1543."

— Nathaniel Wanley, *The Wonders of the Little World*, 1678.

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The dead fear no more the heat of the sun nor the furious winter's rages. Nor need they fear the sharper cruelties of man: Torture cannot touch them; murder has for them no meaning; they are beyond the reach of oppression and ingratitude and slander. But one of man's unceasing inhumanities to man insists upon pursuing its victims beyond the grave — and we do not refer to the ghoulish grave-robbing of dark and primitive ages nor to the necrophily of psychotics, but to a persistent persecution practised by sane and respected citizens in our own country and our own year. It is this black blot upon the record of our times that Miriam Allen deFord studies in this quietly sensitive story — with a suggestion that the dead may not be so helpless as their persecutors assume.

Old Man Morgan's Grave

by MIRIAM ALLEN DEFORD

OLD MAN MORGAN was never of any importance in our town while he was alive. All the excitement came after he had died.

He was quiet, friendly, fastidiously clean, and shiningly honest, and he was a good cobbler. Often I have watched those gnarled, skillful fingers at work, and thought how much of a man's personality is in his hands. He came here right after World War I, old even then for a newly discharged soldier, and long before he was gray people were calling him Old Man Morgan. He must have been over 70 when he died in a heart attack last March.

He was the only Negro in the town.

I rented him the little shop with living quarters behind it in that building I own on Second Street, and he lived there alone, in two scrubbed and polished rooms. He often remarked that he had no living relatives. Like so many cobblers, he had a philosophical and metaphysical turn of mind — maybe it's something in the long hours they spend doing mechanical work, which gives them leisure for meditation — and though I'm sure his formal education hadn't gone beyond grammar school, Miss Vestris at the library told me once that there wasn't a serious, solid book on her shelves he hadn't read. She was always sending to the State Library for things he wanted that she didn't have.

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A few of us, through the years, got into the habit of dropping in of an evening to the bare, finically immaculate little sitting-room back of the shop, for long sessions of talk with Morgan — old Dr. Sprague; John Thorpe, the frail young pastor of our Community Church; sometimes Miss Vestris herself; and I. He was an aging Negro cobbler, and we were all white and of the so-called professional class; but we had two things in common — we were interested in abstract discussion, with a special flair for the psychic and extrasensory, and we were unattached, lonely people. I guess we were the nearest to friends he had, though everyone liked him and wished him well.

Everybody, that is to say, except Floretta Bewley — though that didn't come out till after Morgan was dead. Not that it was a surprise. Floretta was a Hatcher, and this is Hatcherstown. On that basis, she is the town aristocrat. On the same count, I ought to be an aristocrat too, for my maternal grandmother's maiden name was Hatcher; but then I have other things to occupy my mind, and Mrs. Bewley hasn't. She has every thread of the town's life tied around her fat fingers, and with Sam Bewley's money to hand out, there aren't many people who don't cave in the minute she raises her squawking voice. I'm one of the few — in my opinion, my distant cousin Floretta is a bigot and a menace. Probably she never laid eyes on Old Man Morgan — she doesn't have to have her handmade shoes repaired — but what happened certainly came as no unexpected shock to any of us — though even I hadn't thought her capable of quite such depths of nastiness.

It started when Thorpe called me up about half-past 7 on a Wednesday evening. Morgan had died Monday night. His heart had been acting up for several years, and he'd made Dr. Sprague tell him the truth. He speculated a lot, despite our protests, on what would happen after what was coming to him soon. I recall his saying: "I hope some of me stays a long time here in Hatcherstown. I've been contented here."

The *Herald-Despatch* comes out on Wednesdays, and it carried a brief paragraph — something to the effect that Alpheus Morgan, colored, the old-time shoe-repair man on Second Street, had succumbed to a heart attack, and that the funeral would be at 10 o'clock Thursday morning at the Community Church, with interment in Mount Olivet.

"Hartley," Thorpe said on the phone, "can you come over to my place right away?" He sounded upset. "It's about the Morgan funeral," he added.

We don't lock doors much in Hatcherstown. I walked right in and upstairs to Thorpe's study. He was sitting at his desk; his mouth was fixed in a tight line and that little tic he gets in his right temple when he's excited was flickering like mad. Perched on the edge of his most comfortable chair, with her stout legs planted stiffly before her, her face red, and her wattles

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quivering, was Floretta Bewley. When I said "Good evening" she just glared.

"Dr. Sprague will be here in a minute," Thorpe told me. His voice was strained.

Sprague came right on my heels, and he had Annie Vestris with him.

"Miss Vestris was in my office when you called," he said, "and when she heard it was something about Old Man Morgan she insisted on coming along."

Mrs. Bewley fixed her with an oystery eye and made a noise between a grunt and a sniff. Annie's a nervous, fidgety sort of person generally, but she stared defiantly back. It took courage; Floretta is on the library board — as what isn't she on, that you don't have to be elected to?

"Well," she snorted, "let's get this over with. I still don't see the necessity of calling in all these — these persons. I've told you a simple fact, Mr. Thorpe, and there's not a thing any of you can do about it."

I raised an eyebrow at Thorpe. We'd all found ourselves chairs by now.

He said very quietly: "Mrs. Bewley says we can't have the Morgan funeral tomorrow."

"I said no such thing and you know it," she retorted. "You're the minister here — for the present at least — and nobody can stop you from officiating at any services you choose to hold in the church — though perhaps the board of trustees will have something to say about that at their next meeting." She was on that board, too, of course, and by far the largest contributor to the church. "But you can *not* bury this man in Mount Olivet Cemetery."

"Why not?" I inquired. "Morgan bought a plot nearly ten years ago. As his executor, I have the bill of sale in my possession this minute."

She turned the barrage full on me.

"You're a fool, Wayne Hartley," she informed me. "Allow me, as a director of the cemetery corporation —"

"I'm one too — remember?" I interrupted.

"I know that perfectly well. And I suppose you thought you put something over on me when you sold that plot, didn't you? Just because I'm too busy to give proper attention to every one of my interests, or to follow every little detail, you and whoever else was in on it deliberately violated the articles of incorporation..

"I suppose you merely overlooked the fact that burials in Mount Olivet are limited to members of the Caucasian race?"

"Now, just a minute, Floretta," I said. I could feel my throat tightening up. "If that clause is in the articles — and I suppose you must have looked it up — it dates back to a day when conditions were very different from what they are now. It's obsolete and obstructive, and it was never meant to be

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acted on to bar a good citizen and a good man like Morgan. Why, you know yourself that as long as this town has existed everybody from Hatcherstown has been buried in that cemetery. It's the only one we have."

"They have not!" she crowed triumphantly. "Within just the past few years, what about that Emmet Sheehan? What about that man Cohen who owned the Bon Ton Store?"

"That's a completely different thing. Naturally Emmet Sheehan and Isaac Cohen were laid away in cemeteries of their own faith. But Alpheus Morgan was a member of the Community Church, just as much as you are; and except for one or two newcomers who had family plots elsewhere, every communicant of this church has been laid to rest in Mount Olivet in our lifetime."

I clamped my jaw to keep from reminding her of some of the dirty, sneaking ways she had harassed Sheehan and Cohen, too, to make their lives miserable. Floretta Bewley's prejudices aren't specialized.

Her face grew redder still, till I thought she was going to burst.

"You might as well save your breath," she snapped. "If you think for one minute that any of your specious lawyer-talk is going to keep me from preventing this — this insult — Why, do you realize that the plot you idiots sold illegally to this man is in the very next section to my own family plot — that it's not a hundred feet from the monument to the Founder himself?"

I had to hide a grin. A while ago I thought of writing a history of the town for the State Historical Society, and I did a bit of research, back in Pennsylvania where he came from, on Matthew Hatcher. I wonder how Floretta Bewley would take the revelation that when old Matthew came out here with his young "bride" and founded our town, he'd left a wife and four children behind him? But he was my great-great-great-grandfather too, so I've decided to let him rest in posthumous rectitude.

"That isn't a Christian attitude, Mrs. Bewley," Thorpe said mildly.

"And what's more, it's insane," Dr. Sprague put in. "What are you trying to do, Mrs. Bewley — make Hatcherstown the scene of a national scandal? Have you forgotten the reaction when that cemetery in Sioux City refused to bury the Indian soldier who was killed in Korea? You do anything to interfere with that funeral tomorrow, and by night the news services will have hold of it, and there will be headlines in every paper in the United States — and worse headlines still in countries where a case like that would be considered a perfect godsend.

"How would you like to see our cemetery surrounded by pickets waving propaganda banners — and perhaps other people picketing the pickets? How would you like to see Hatcherstown the arena of a disgraceful public squabble between the anti-democratic forces of the left and of the right?"

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"Piffle. The news services can't get the story unless somebody from the *Herald-Despatch* sends it in — and don't forget I hold the majority stock in the *Herald-Despatch.*

"I didn't come here to argue; I came to tell you that I'm going to prevent that burial. If you think I'm going to sit back and see my dear husband's grave right next to that of a dirty old —"

"He wasn't dirty!" Annie Vestris's lips were trembling but she looked Floretta Bewley right in the face. "He kept himself and his place as clean and neat as a pin. I never knew a fussier housekeeper, or a man as tidy about his own person, as Mr. Morgan was. If you could have seen him carefully straightening a curtain, or picking up the least bit of lint from the rug —"

"*Mr.* Morgan!" Floretta pinned the librarian down with a cold stare. "I don't know, Miss Vestris, that our town library ought to be under the charge of a woman who acknowledges such a close personal acquaintance with the household arrangements of —"

"That's enough, Mrs. Bewley." The minister rose to his feet, and even Floretta Bewley shut up at the look on his face. She stood too, and gathered her mink coat about her.

"Very well," she announced. "I've given you fair warning. I have no more to say. Hold your funeral service tomorrow morning if you wish, Mr. Thorpe, but when it's over you will have to reconsign the remains to the undertaker's establishment, until *Mr.* Morgan's executor here can arrange for burial in a Negro cemetery. At the next meeting of the cemetery directors, I'll see that the purchase price of the lot is refunded and sent to Wayne Hartley to add to his client's estate.

"As for me, the first thing in the morning I shall go up to Chantonville, and I shall have no difficulty in securing a restraining order from Judge Ogden. In fact, I called him up before I came here tonight, and he agrees with me entirely."

We knew she could do it, all right. Judge Ogden is as narrow-minded as he is senile — and hand-in-glove with Floretta Bewley.

"I shall be at the gate of Mount Olivet tomorrow with an officer of the law, and if you dare to attempt to bring this person's remains through that gate, I shall see that the injunction is served. If you want to avoid unpleasant publicity for Hatcherstown, Dr. Sprague, then don't put yourself in a position where all of you will have to appear at a court hearing and maybe find yourselves imprisoned for contempt of court."

She swept to the door of the study.

"Mrs. Bewley," Thorpe pleaded, "won't you at least think this over? Can't anything at all make you reconsider?"

"The only thing that could ever make me reconsider, Mr. Thorpe," she

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responded icily, "would be a miracle — and I am afraid that is something which you are not equipped to provide."

She slammed the door behind her.

Three pairs of baffled, expectant eyes turned to me in appeal. After all, I'm a lawyer.

"There are just two things I have to get off my chest — things I wouldn't waste my breath telling Floretta Bewley," I said. "Then, if you're willing to take the risk, I think there is something we can do. She can't harm me much, or Dr. Sprague either, but she can ruin you, Miss Vestris, or you, Mr. Thorpe. There are plenty of people who will back her up."

"If I can't be free to follow the principles in which I believe," said the minister, "then I shall take my chances on finding another church."

"I feel the same way," agreed Annie Vestris stoutly. Poor Annie, 30 years in the library on a starvation salary!

"Well, one thing I want to say is that six months ago I drew up Morgan's will. He had a pretty good trade, and he lived very simply and thriftily. Everything he left, after the expenses are paid, is going to found a college scholarship for deserving boys and girls from Hatcherstown."

"That Mrs. Bewley!" murmured Miss Vestris vindictively.

"She'd probably consider that only one more evidence of Morgan's presumption.

"And the other thing is the reason Alpheus Morgan has no surviving relatives to speak for him now. He had a wife once, and two children, and a mother. They all died the same day, long ago, in a race riot in the little town where he was born. He wasn't there — he was in the army of his country. . . .

"Now, legally, a man does not own his own body. But in the absence of near relatives, his wishes as to its disposal prevail.

"Morgan loved Hatcherstown. When I drew up his will, he insisted that I incorporate in it his deep desire to be buried in the only place where, as he put it to me, he had been treated like a human being."

"I know that's true," Dr. Sprague put in. "Just before he lapsed into unconsciousness he said to me, 'Doctor, I don't know how far my spirit's going to wander, but I'm glad my old bones will rest forever near the only friends I ever had.' "

"Exactly. And I propose that we see to it that his last wish is carried out. For another point of law is that once a body is buried it cannot be disinterred, even by the authorities, except for the most urgent and cogent reasons. My contention is that the clause in the incorporation papers on which Mrs. Bewley relies is a mere dead letter, which it is not necessary to observe, and that in any event once Morgan had been given a receipt for the plot

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he had a legal right to burial there. Mrs. Bewley's injunction will never stand up on appeal to a higher court. But we can't wait till she finds that out."

"But if we disobey the injunction, won't we be breaking the law?" asked Thorpe.

"There is no injunction for us to disobey until she gets hold of Judge Ogden tomorrow," I replied.

"You mean —?"

"Just who do you think will be coming to Morgan's funeral?"

"Why — you three here — and perhaps some of his neighbors — and the people who never miss anybody's funeral. Why?"

"In other words, the only ones with a personal interest in the old man are here now in this room. I propose that we adjourn to the church and hold the services this evening — and that then we proceed to bury Alpheus Morgan in his plot in Mount Olivet."

"Hold on a second, Hartley," Dr. Sprague objected. "Hornbuckle's got something to say about that, hasn't he? Morgan's body is in Hornbuckle's funeral parlors right now, and he's got all the arrangements made for tomorrow."

"Have you forgotten Jim Hornbuckle is my sister's husband?" Annie Vestris interposed. "Jim's all right. He hates Mrs. Bewley, anyway. He's never forgiven her for calling in that big city mortician when her husband passed away. You call him up, Mr. Thorpe, and explain everything to him. He'll be glad to co-operate."

"There's another thing, though." That was the doctor again. "How are we going to get into the cemetery? It's locked up now, and Ed Frater's off duty."

"We wouldn't want to involve him anyway," I answered. "You forget I'm a director, just as much as Mrs. Bewley is. I have a key.

"The grave's dug already. Ed Frater did it this afternoon; I checked with him. If Hornbuckle will accompany us, we four men can carry the casket off the hearse and put it in the grave ourselves, and cover it over enough to constitute a legitimate burial. Later on, Frater can smooth and sod the plot; the tombstone won't be ready for setting for a few days in any case. The moon will be up by 11, and one of us can hold a flashlight for the others if we need more light."

"I'll do that," said Miss Vestris. "No — don't shake your heads. I'm going with you. We're all Mr. Morgan's friends, and we must all stand together."

"Shall I call Mr. Hornbuckle?" Thorpe inquired. "I can make preparations to hold the services any time after he delivers the remains."

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"It's 8:30 now." I looked at my watch. "I'll have to go home and get the key to the cemetery gate. Suppose we tell Hornbuckle the funeral will be at half-past nine."

"Will you take me with you?" asked Miss Vestris. "If you can stop off by my place, my lilac bush is full of blossoms, spring has been so early, and I could pick a big bunch and bring them back."

Dr. Sprague cleared his throat.

"In the lack of anyone better," he said, "I can play the organ well enough for a hymn or two, if you'll let me into the church first to practice for a while."

We came back loaded with Miss Vestris's lilacs. But it had clouded up, and it smelled like snow.

It was a strange funeral, but there was more genuine feeling to it than to many more elaborate ones I have attended. And it was a strange, silent procession out to Mount Olivet, with Hornbuckle driving his own hearse, and the rest of us following in the doctor's car. I was right — it had started to snow, after the premature spring, and by the time we reached Mount Olivet it was snowing heavily and staying on the ground.

We found the plot without any difficulty — it was practically in the shadow of the Hatcher monument, as Mrs. Bewley had observed, and Sam Bewley's ornate tombstone stared at us right across the path. Ed Frater had done his job as thoroughly as always. We couldn't get into his toolshed, so we had no rope and pulley and no grass mat, but we men, even though Hornbuckle was the only one of us who could be described as really husky, managed with a good deal of puffing and creaking to get the casket in place. Since the moon was hidden, Miss Vestris held the flashlight for us.

Then we discovered we had no shovels to fill the grave. By this time the snow was really piling up. There was nothing else to do; we all, even Miss Vestris, set to work on the pile of loose earth with our hands. Finally we got most of it transferred from the graveside into the hole, though Frater would certainly be horrified when he beheld that lumpy, loose, irregular mound. I made a mental note to call him at his home before he left in the morning. Already the snow was covering the big pile of earth, and our footprints were plain in the trampled space around it.

"And now what, Hartley?" inquired Dr. Sprague as our tired, dirty crew hobbled back to the cars.

"Mrs. Bewley won't be able to get to Chantonville and get hold of Judge Ogden much before 9. She expects the funeral to be at 10 o'clock at the church, as the paper announced. I doubt if she'll bother to check it; she expects us to defy her, and she's sure to be here at the cemetery gate with her injunction by 10:30 at the latest. I propose to be here before she is, and

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to face her down with the accomplished fact. What will happen next is anybody's guess.

"It won't be necessary for anyone else to come too, but if any of you should want to, it's all right as far as I am concerned."

Thorpe and Sprague said right away that they would come. Miss Vestris couldn't make it, because she was due at the library. It was lucky she wasn't there, in view of what happened.

I got Frater on the phone early in the morning, told him the funeral had been "postponed," and to do nothing about the Morgan grave till I got in touch with him again. He was puzzled, but he's used to taking orders from the directors, and he said he was glad to have the time to clear the paths of snow.

Just in case Mrs. Bewley should take it into her head to turn up early, I drove to the cemetery right after breakfast, and parked my car near the gate. It was still snowing a little — just a few lazy flakes fluttering down. The heavy fall had stopped by the time we reached home the night before. Sprague and Thorpe arrived in Sprague's car soon after me. We all had the right hunch. It wasn't ten minutes after they got there that we saw Mrs. Bewley's big limousine rolling up the drive, and when it stopped and the chauffeur opened the door, Frank Voorhies, one of the deputy marshals, got out right after her.

Floretta approached full sail, with the expression of a soap opera mother forbidding the banns.

"There's no use your holding the fort here, Wayne Hartley," she blared. "Judge Ogden has issued the injunction on my petition. Morgan is not to be buried in this cemetery — or you will be held in contempt of court."

Then she realized that Thorpe was among those present. She looked at him blankly.

"Do I understand that you have come to your senses among you and called this funeral off?" she demanded.

Before any of us could open our mouths, there was a yell from inside the gate. I turned and beheld Ed Frater racing down the path, white to the gills.

"Mr. Hartley! Mr. Hartley!" he gasped. "I just went down to take a look at that grave before I started work on the other side, and — and —" His breath gave out.

I saw suspicion leap into Floretta Bewley's bulging eyes.

"Have you been up to any underhanded monkey-business, Wayne Hartley?" she pounced on me. "If you've tried to put anything over on me — here, you, whatever your name is, tell me instantly what is wrong!"

Frater goggled at her, still unable to speak. I pushed the gate open and

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as if that were a signal Frater turned and began running toward the Hatcher monument. We all hurried after him in an untidy huddle. In a minute we were shouldering one another at Old Man Morgan's graveside.

Frater pointed with a trembling finger.

I heard Thorpe draw a sharp breath, and Dr. Sprague swore aloud in amazement. Only Voorhies looked from one to another of us in dumb perplexity.

As for Mrs. Bewley, she emitted the shrill scream of a steam-whistle, and collapsed heavily against the deputy marshal. From his bewildered grasp she lifted a face yellow and twitching with fright.

"Is — is he down there?" she asked through chattering teeth. I managed to nod stiffly.

It took a clergyman to master his primitive fear quickly and take command of the situation.

"Mrs. Bewley," Thorpe said sternly, "you answered me blasphemously last evening that only a miracle could make you change your mind and cease your persecution of this good man.

"The miracle has occurred. I expect you to leave at once, taking this officer with you, and withdraw your petition for an injunction against your fellow-directors. Alpheus Morgan is to rest here in peace. And you are to make no reprisals against his friends, who have seen to it that his express wish was obeyed.

"Is that understood?"

In our unbelieving sight Floretta Bewley bent her arrogant head, turned meekly, and tottered shakily, supported by Voorhies, back to her car.

Because — she had seen what we all had seen.

Everywhere else in that wilderness of death last night's snow was piled heavily on mounds and tombstones. But at Old Man Morgan's grave, instead of the huge, clumsily piled mass of earth we had left behind us, the ground had been smoothed level, with four straight edges defining it. Only the few flakes still falling spotted its uniform brown.

And around it, in the heavy snow, were no footsteps whatever.

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In a sense, the whole wondrous saga of Simon Templar, that brighter buccaneer more generally known as The Saint, is fantasy: such wittily romantic adventure, such highflown yet half-satiric swashbuckling has never existed on Earth — and Earth is the poorer for its absence. But in all of the countless novels, novelets and short stories devoted to The Saint, only twice has his creator Leslie Charteris stepped completely over the line separating crime-romance from fantasy and/or science fiction. On both occasions he chose classic imaginative themes and made them completely new by the unexpected intrusion of the lively and delightful Saint personality. Here you will learn what happens when the Robin Hood of modern crime finds himself a leading character in a bank clerk's dream; and if you enjoy it as much as we do, we promise to bring you soon the other Impossible Adventure of The Saint — and perhaps even more, if Mr. Charteris can ever be persuaded to stop living off of subsidiary rights and return to the field of writing which so badly needs his unique touch.

The Darker Drink

by LESLIE CHARTERIS

So when that Angel of the Darker Drink
At last shall find you by the river-brink,
And, offering his Cup, invite your Soul
Forth to your lips to quaff — you shall not shrink.
— Omar Khayyam

SIMON TEMPLAR looked up from the frying pan in which six mountain trout were developing a crisp golden tan. Above the gentle sputter of grease, the sound of feet on dry pine needles crackled through the cabin window.

It didn't cross his mind that the sound carried menace, for it was twilight in the Sierras, and the dusky calm stirred only with the rustlings of nature at peace.

The Saint also was at peace. In spite of everything his enemies would have

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said, there actually were times when peace was the main preoccupation of that fantastic freebooter; when hills and blue sky were high enough adventure, and baiting a hook was respite enough from baiting policemen or promoters. In such a mood he had jumped at the invitation to join a friend in a week of hunting and fishing in the High Sierras — a friend who had been recalled to town on urgent business almost as soon as they arrived, leaving the Saint in by no means melancholy solitude, for Simon Templar could always put up with his own company.

The footsteps came nearer with a kind of desperate urgency. Simon moved the frying pan off the flames and flowed, rather than walked, to where he could see through windows in two directions.

A man came out of the pines. He was traveling on the short side of a dead run, but straining with every gasping breath to step up his speed. He came, hatless and coatless, across the pine-carpeted clearing toward the cabin door.

He burst through it; and in spite of his relaxation the Saint felt a kind of simmer of anticipating approval. If his solitude had to be intruded on, this was the way it should happen. Unannounced. At a dead run.

The visitor slammed the door, shot the bolt, whirled around, and seemed about to fold in the middle. He saw the Saint. His jaw sagged, swung adrift on its hinges for a moment, then imitated a steel trap.

After the sharp click of his teeth, he said: "How did you get in here? Where's Dawn?"

"Dawn?" Simon echoed lazily. "If you're referring to the rosy-fingered goddess who peels away the darkness each morning, she's on the twelve-hour shift, chum. She'll be around at the regular time."

"I never dreamed you here," the man said. "Who are you?"

"You dropped a word," the Saint said. " 'I never dreamed you *were* here' makes more sense."

"Nuts, brother. You're part of my dream, and I never saw you before. You don't even have a name. All the others have, complete with backgrounds. But I can't place you. Funny, I —— Look here, you're not real, are you?"

"The last time I pinched myself, I yelped."

"This is crazy," the man muttered.

He walked across the pine floor to within a couple of feet of the Saint. He was breathing easier now, and the Saint examined him impassively.

He was big, only a shade under the Saint's six feet two, with sandy hair, a square jaw, and hard brown eyes.

"May I?" he said, and pinched the Saint. He sighed. "I was afraid this was happening. When I put my arms around Dawn Winter in my dreams, she ——"

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"Please," the Saint broke in. "Gentlemen don't go into lurid detail after the lady has a name."

"Oh, she's only part of my dream." The stranger stared into space, and an almost tangible aura of desire formed about him. "God!" he whispered. "I really dreamed up something in her."

"We must swap reminiscences someday," the Saint said. "But at the moment the pine-scented breeze is laden with threshings in the underbrush."

"I've got to hide. Quick! Where can I get out of sight?"

The Saint waved expressively at the single room. In its 400 square feet, one might hide a large bird if it were camouflaged as an atlas or something, but that would be about the limit.

The two bunk beds were made with hospital precision, and even a marble would have bulged under their tight covers. The deck chairs wouldn't offer sanctuary for even an undernourished mouse, the table was high and wide open beneath the rough top, and the bookcase was small and open.

"If we had time," the Saint mused, "I could candy-stripe you — if I had some red paint — and put on a barber's smock. Or — er — you say you're dreaming all this?"

"That's right."

"Then why don't you wake up — and vanish?"

The Saint's visitor unhappily gnawed his full underlip.

"I always have before, when the going got tough, but —— Oh, hell, I don't know what's going on, but I don't want to die — even in my dream. Death is so — so ——"

"Permanent?"

"Mmm, I guess. Listen, would you be a pal and try to steer these guys away? They're after me."

"Why should I?"

"Yeah," the man said. "You don't owe me a damn thing, but I'm trying to help Dawn. She ——"

He broke off to fish an object out of his watch pocket. This was a small chamois bag, and out of it he took something that pulsed with incredible fires. He handed it to the Saint.

"That's Dawn."

The circular fire opal blazed with living beauty — blue, green, gold, cerise, chartreuse — and the Saint gasped with reverent wonder as he looked at the cameo head carved on the unbelievable gem.

There is beauty to which one can put a name. There is beauty that inspires awe, bravery, fear, lust, greed, passion. There is beauty that softens the savage blows of fate. There is beauty that drives to high adventure, to violence.

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That stone, and above all the face cut eternally on its incandescent surface, was beauty beyond belief. No man could look on that face and ever know complete peace again.

She was the lily maid of Astolat, the lost loveliness that all men seek and never find, the nameless desire that haunts the ragged edge of sleep, that curls a lonely smile and sends vacant eyes searching far spaces.

Her face was made for — and of? The Saint asked himself — dreaming.

"Count me in, old boy."

He went outside. Through the dusky stillness the far-off unseen feet pounded nearer.

The feet were four. The men, with mathematical logic, two. One might be a jockey, the other a weight lifter. They tore out of the forest.

"Did you see a kind of big dopey-lookin' lug?" the jockey asked.

The Saint pointed to the other side of the clearing where the hill pitched down.

"He went that way — in a hell of a rush."

"Thanks, pal."

They were off, hot on the imaginary trail, and the sounds of their passage soon faded. The Saint went inside.

"They'll be back," he said. "But meanwhile we can clear up a few points. Could you down a brace of trout? They've probably cooled enough to eat."

"What do you mean, they'll be back?"

"It's inevitable," Simon pointed out as he put coffee on, set the table, and gathered cutlery. "They won't find you. They want to find you. So they'll be back with questions. Since those questions will be directed at me, I'd like to know what not to answer."

"Who are you?"

"Who are you?" the Saint countered.

"I'm — oh, blast it to hell and goddam. The guy you're looking at is Big Bill Holbrook. But he's only something I dreamed up. I'm really Andrew Faulks, and I'm asleep in Glendale, California."

"And I am the queen of Rumania."

"Sure, I know. You don't believe it. Who would? But since you've got me out of a tight spot for the time being, I'd like to tell you what I've never told anybody. But who am I telling?"

"I'm Simon Templar," said the Saint, and waited for a reaction.

"No!" Holbrook-Faulks breathed. "The Saint! What beautiful, wonderful luck. And isn't it just like a bank clerk to work the Saint into his dream?" He paused for breath. "The Robin Hood of Modern Crime, the Twentieth Century's brightest buccaneer, the devil with dames, the headache of cops and crooks alike. What a sixteen-cylinder dream this is."

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"Your alliterative encomia," the Saint murmured, "leave me as awed as your inference. Don't you think you'd better give out with this — er — bedtime story? Before that unholy pair return with gun-lined question marks?"

The strange man rubbed his eyes in a dazed helpless way.

"I don't know where to begin," he said conventionally.

But after a while, haltingly, he tried.

Andrew Faulks, in the normal course of events, weathered the slingshots and arrows of outrageous playmates and grew up to be a man.

As men will, he fixed his heart and eyes on a girl and eventually married her. As women will, she gave birth in due course to a boy, Andy Jr., and later a girl, Alexandria.

He became a bank clerk, and went to and from home on an immutable schedule. He got an occasional raise; he was bawled out at times by the head teller; he became a company man, a white-collar worker, and developed all the political ills that white-collared flesh is heir to.

And he dreamed. Literally.

This was what Big Bill Holbrook told the Saint in the mountain cabin to which Simon had retired to await the blowing over of a rather embarrassing situation which involved items duly registered on police records.

"In the first dream, I was coming out of this hotel, see. And whammo! Bumping into her woke me — Oh, the hell with it. Whoever was dreaming woke up, but it was me bumped into her. And I was sorry as hell, because, brother, she was something."

Some two weeks later, Big Bill said, he bumped into her again. The dream started exactly as its predecessor, progressed exactly to the point of collision.

"But I didn't awaken this time. We each apologized all over the place and somehow we were walking along together. Just as I was about to ask her to have dinner, I woke up again."

"Or Andy did," the Saint supplied.

"Yeah. Whoever. Now this is what happened. Every ten days or two weeks, I'd be back in this dream, starting out of the hotel, crashing into her, walking along, having dinner, getting to know her better each dream. Each one started exactly the same, but each one went a little further into her life. It was like reading the same book over and over, always starting back at the beginning, but getting one chapter further every time. I got so used to it that I'd say to myself, 'This is where I woke up last time,' and then after the dream had gone on a bit further I'd begin to think, 'Well, I guess this must be getting near the end of another installment,' and sure enough, about that time I'd wake up again."

The accidental encounter began to develop sinister ramifications, picked

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up unsavory characters, and put Big Bill Holbrook in the role of a Robin Hood.

"Or a Saint," he amended, "rescuing a dame from a bunch of lugs."

And there was, of course, the jewel.

It had a history. The fire opal, which seemed to be eternal yet living beauty, had carved upon it the likeness of Dawn's great-great-grandmother, of whom the girl was the living image.

The talented Oriental craftsman who had chiseled those features which were the essence of beauty — that wily fellow had breathed upon the cameo gem a curse.

The curse: It must not get out of the possession of the family — or else.

Death, deprivation, and a myriad other unpleasantries were predicted if the stone fell into alien hands.

The name of Selden Appopoulis sort of slithered into the tale. This was a fat man, a lecherous fat man, a greedy fat man, who wanted — not loved — Dawn; and who wanted — *and* loved — the cameo opal. In some fashion that was not exactly clear to the Saint, the fat man was in a position to put a financial squeeze on her. In each succeeding dream of Andrew Faulks, Glendale bank clerk, Dawn's position became more and more untenable. In desperation she finally agreed to turn the jewel over to Appopoulis. The fat man sent for the jewel by the two henchmen whom the Saint had directed off into the Holbrook-bare woods.

"Now in this dream — this here *now* dream," Holbrook said, "I took it away from him, see? Andy Faulks went to sleep in Glendale Saturday night and — say, what day is it now?"

"Tuesday."

"Yeah, that's the way it seems to me too. And that's funny. If you're really part of this dream you'd naturally think it was Tuesday, because your time and my time would be the same. But you don't seem like part of a dream. I pinched you and — oh, nuts, I'm all mixed up."

"Let's try and be clear about this," said the Saint patiently. "You know that it's Tuesday here, but you think you're dreaming all this in Glendale on Saturday night."

"I don't know," said the other wearily. "You see, I never dreamed more than one day at a stretch before. But tonight it's been going on and on. It's gone way past the time when I ought to have woken up. But I don't seem to be able to wake up. I've tried . . . My God, suppose I don't wake up! Suppose I never *can* wake up? Suppose I never can get back, and I have to go on and on with this, being Big Bill Holbrook ——"

"You could take a trip to Glendale," Simon suggested gravely, "and try waking Faulks up."

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Holbrook-Faulks stared at him with oddly unfocused eyes.

"I can't," he said huskily. "I thought of that — once. But I couldn't make myself do it. I — I'm scared . . . of what I might find. . . . Suppose ——"

He broke off, his pupils dilated with the formless horror of a glimpse of something that no mind could conceive.

Simon roused him again, gently: "So you took the jewel ——"

Holbrook snapped out of his reverie.

"Yeah, and I lammed out for this cabin. Dawn was supposed to meet me here. But I guess I can't control all these characters. Say," he asked suddenly, "who do you suppose I am? Faulks or Holbrook?"

"I suggest you ask your mother, old boy."

"This ain't funny. I mean, who do you *really* suppose I am? Andy Faulks is asleep and dreaming me but I've got all his memories, so am I a projection of Andy or am I me and him both? None of these other characters have any more memories than they need."

Simon wondered if the two men chasing Holbrook were his keepers; he could use a few. In fact, Simon reflected, keepers would fit into the life of Holbrook-Faulks like thread in a needle. But he sipped his brandy and urged the man to continue.

"Well, something's happened," Holbrook-Faulks said. "It never was like this before. I never could smell things before. I never could really feel them. You know how it is in a dream. But now it seems like as if you stuck a knife in me I'd bleed real blood. You don't suppose a — a reiterated dream could become reality?"

"I," said the Saint, "am a rank amateur in that department."

"Well, I was too — or Andy was, whichever of us is me — but I read everything I could get my hands on about dreams — or Andy did — and it didn't help a bit."

Most men wouldn't have heard the faint far-off stirring in the forest. But the Saint's ears, attuned by long practice to detect sound that differed from what should be there, picked up evidence of movement toward the cabin.

"Some one," he said suddenly, "and I mean one, is coming. Not your pursuers — it's from the opposite direction."

Holbrook-Faulks listened.

"I don't hear anything."

"I didn't expect you to — yet. Now that it's dark, perhaps you'd better slip outside, brother, and wait. I don't pretend to believe your yarn, but that some game is afoot is so obvious that even Sherlock Holmes could detect it. I suggest that we prepare for eventualities."

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The eventuality that presently manifested itself was a girl. And it was a girl who could have been no one but Dawn Winter.

She came wearily into the cabin, disheveled, her dress torn provocatively so that sun-browned flesh showed through, her cloud of golden hair swirled in fairy patterns, her dark eyes brooding, her mouth a parted dream.

The Saint caught his breath and began to wonder whether he could really make Big Bill Holbrook wake up and vanish.

"Do you belong to the coffee and/or brandy school of thought?" he asked.

"Please." She fell carelessly into a chair, and the Saint coined a word.

She was glamorous beyond belief.

"Miss Winter, pull down your dress or I'll never get this drink poured. You've turned me into an aspen. You're the most beautiful hunk of flesh I've ever seen. Have your drink and go, please."

She looked at him then, and took in the steel-cable leanness of him, the height of him, the crisp black hair, the debonair blue eyes. She smiled, and a brazen gong tolled in the Saint's head.

"Must I?" she said.

Her voice caught at the core of desire and tangled itself forever there.

"Set me some task," the Saint said uncertainly. "Name me a mountain to build, a continent to sink, a star to fetch you in the morning."

The cabin door crashed open. The spell splintered into shining shards. Holbrook-Faulks stood stony-faced against the door.

"Hello, Bill," the girl said, her eyes still on the Saint. "I came, you see."

Bill's gaze was an unwavering glance, with the Saint pinioned on its blazing tip.

"Am I gonna have trouble with you too, Saint?"

The Saint opened his mouth to answer, and stiffened as another sound reached his ears. Jockey and weight lifter were returning.

"We'll postpone any jousting over the fair lady for the moment," Simon said. "We're about to have more company."

Holbrook stared wildly around.

"Come on, Dawn. Out the window. They'll kill us."

Many times before in his checkered career the Saint had had to make decisions in a fragment of time — when a gun was leveled and a finger whitening on the trigger, when a traffic accident roared toward consummation, when a ship was sinking, when a knife flashed through candlelight. His decision now was compounded of several factors, none of which was the desire for self-preservation. The Saint rarely gave thought room to self-preservation — never when there was something more important to preserve.

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He did not want this creature of tattered loveliness, this epitome of what men live for, to get out of his sight. He must therefore keep her inside the cabin. And there was no place to hide. . . .

His eyes narrowed as he looked at the two bunks. He was tearing out the mattresses before his thought was fully formed. He tossed the mattresses in a corner where shadows had retreated from the candle on the table. Then he motioned to Holbrook.

"Climb up. Make like a mattress."

He boosted the big man into the top bunk, and his hands were like striking brown snakes as he packed blankets around him and remade the bed so that it only looked untidily put together.

"Now you," he said to the girl.

She got into the lower bunk and lay flat on her back, her disturbing head in the far corner. The Saint deposited a swift kiss upon her full red lips. They were cool and soft, and the Saint was adrift for a second.

Then he covered her. He emptied a box of pine cones on the mattresses and arranged the whole to appear as a corner heap of cones.

He was busy cleaning the dishes when the pounding came on the door.

As he examined the pair, Simon Templar was struck by the fact that these men were types, such types as B pictures had imprinted upon the consciousness of the world.

The small one could be a jockey, but one with whom you could make a deal. For a consideration, he would pull a horse in the stretch or slip a Mickey into a rival rider's sarsaparilla. In the dim light that fanned out from the door, his eyes were small and ratlike, his mouth a slit of cynicism.

His heavier companion was a different but equally familiar type. This man was Butch to a T. He was large, placid, oafish, and an order taker. His not to reason why; his but to do — or cry. He'd be terribly hurt if he failed to do what he was ordered; he'd apologize, he'd curse himself.

It crossed the Saint's mind that a bank clerk such as Andrew Faulks had been described would dream such characters.

"So you lied to us," the little man snarled.

The Saint arched an eyebrow. At the same time he reached out and twisted the little man's nose, as if he were trying to unscrew it.

"When you address me, Oswald, say 'sir.' "

The little man sprang back in outraged fury. He clapped one hand to his injured proboscis, now turning a deeper purple than the night. The other hand slid under his coat.

Simon waited until he had the gun out of the holster, then leaped the intervening six feet and twisted it from the little man's hand. The Saint let the gun swing from his finger by its trigger guard.

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"Take him, Mac!" grated the disarmed man.

Mac vented a kind of low growl, but did nothing but fidget as the Saint turned curious blue eyes on him. The tableau hung frozen for a long moment before the little man shattered the silence.

"Well? Ya afraid of 'im?"

"Yup," Mac said unhappily. "Criminy, Jimmy, 'f he c'n get the best uh you, well, criminy, Jimmy."

Jimmy moaned: "You mean you're gonna stand there and let just one guy take my gun away from me? Cripes, he ain't a army."

"No," Mac agreed, growing more unhappy by the second, "but he kind of seems like one, Jimmy. Didja see that jump? Criminy, Jimmy."

The Saint decided to break it up.

"Now, Oswald ——"

"Didn'ja hear Mac? Name's Jimmy."

"Oswald," the Saint said firmly, "is how I hold you in my heart. Now, Oswald, perhaps you'll pour oil on these troubled waters, before I take you limb from muscle and throw you away."

"We don't want no trouble," Jimmy said. "We want Big Bill. You got him, but we got to take him back with us."

"And who is Big Bill, and why do you want him, and why do you think I have him?"

"We know you got him," Jimmy said. "This here's Trailer Mac."

The Saint nodded at Mac.

"Charmed, I'm sure."

"Hey, Jimmy," Mac broke in, "this guy's a phony."

Jimmy blinked.

"Owls," Mac explained, "can't swim."

"What the damblasted hell has owls to do with it?" Jimmy demanded.

"He said pour owls on the something waters. So that," Mac said in triumph, "proves it."

This, the Saint thought, wanders. He restrained Jimmy from assaulting Mac, and returned to the subject.

"Why should the revelation of this gent's identity be regarded as even an intimation that I have — what was the name? — Big Bill?"

"Holbrook," Jimmy said. "Why, this is Trailer Mac. Ain't you never heard of him? He follered Loopie Louie for eighteen years and finally caught 'im in the middle of Lake Erie."

"I never heard of him," Simon said, and smiled at Mac's hurt look. "But then there are lots of people I've never heard of."

This, he thought as he said it, was hardly true. He had filed away in the indexes of his amazing memory the dossiers of almost every crook in history.

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He was certain that he'd have heard of such a chase if it had ever occurred.

"Anyway," Jimmy went on, "we didn't go more'n a coupla miles till Mac he says Big Bill ain't here, 'n he ain't been here, neither. Well, he come this far, 'n he didn't go no farther. So you got him. He's inside."

"The cumulative logic in that series of statements is devastating," the Saint said. "But logicians veer. History will bear me out. Aristotle was a shining example. Likewise all the boys who gave verisimilitude to idiocy by substituting syllogisms for thought processes, who evaded reality by using unsemantic verbalisms for fact-racing and, God save the mark, fact-finding."

Mac appealed to the superior intellect in his crowd.

"Whut'n hell's he talkin' about, Jimmy?"

"I mean," the Saint said, "Big Bill ain't here. Come in and case the joint."

"Whyn't cha say so?" Mac snarled, and pushed inside.

They searched nook and cranny, and Mac fingered a knothole hopefully once. They gave the bunk beds a passing glance, and were incurious about the seeming pile of pine cones in the corner. Mac boosted Jimmy up on the big central beam to peer into ceiling shadows, and they scanned the fireplace chimney.

Then they stood and looked at the Saint with resentment.

"Sump'n's fishy," Jimmy pronounced. "He's got to be here. This here" — he pointed — "is Trailer Mac."

"Maybe we better go get the boss, huh, Jimmy?"

"Yeah," Jimmy agreed. "He'll find Big Bill."

"Who," the Saint inquired, "is the boss?"

"You'll see," Jimmy promised. "He won't be scared of you. He's just down the hill in the town. Stopped off to play a game of billiards. So we'll be seein' ya, bub."

They went off into the night, and the Saint stood quite still for a moment in a little cloud of perplexity.

Never before had he been faced with a situation that was so full of holes.

He added up known data: a man who had a fabulous jewel, who claimed to be the projected dream of his alter ego; a girl of incredible beauty said to be another creation of that dream; and two characters who were after the man and/or the jewel and/or — perhaps — the girl.

Mac and Jimmy had searched the cabin. They professed to have overlooked an object the size of Big Bill Holbrook. Their proof that they had overlooked him: "This here's Trailer Mac." They assumed he would remain here while they walked four miles to the settlement and back with their boss who was said to have stopped off to shoot a game of billiards.

But would a man on the trail of that fire opal stop off to play billiards? Would two pseudo-tough guys go away and leave their quarry unguarded?

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No, the Saint decided. These were the observable facts, but they were unimportant. They masked a larger, more sinister pattern. Great forces must be underlying the surface trivia. Undeniably, the jewel was a thing to drive men to madness. It could motivate historic bloodshed. The girl, too, possessing the carven features of the gem, could drive men to — anything. But for the life of him, the Saint could not get beneath the surface pattern to what must be the real issues. He could only cling to the conviction that they had to exist, and that they must be deadly.

He turned back to the bunk beds.

"Come on out, kids," he said. "The big bad wolves have temporarily woofed away."

Fear lingered in the dark depths of Dawn Winter's eyes, making her even more hauntingly beautiful. The Saint found strange words forming on his lips, as if some other being possessed them.

He seemed to be saying: "Dawn . . . I've seen the likeness of every beauty in history or imagination. Every one of them would be a drab shadow beside you. You are so beautiful that the world would bow down and worship you — if the world knew of your existence. Yet it's impossible that the world doesn't know. If one single person looked at you, the word would go out. Cameramen would beat a path to your door, artists would dust off their palettes, agents would clamor with contracts. But somehow this hasn't happened. Why? Where, to be trite, have you been all my life?"

He couldn't define the expression which now entered her eyes. It might have been bewilderment, or worry, or fear, or an admixture.

"I — I ——" She put a hand as graceful as a calla lily against her forehead. "I — don't know."

"Oh, don't let's carry this too far." It sounded more like himself again. "Where were you born, where did you go to school, who are your parents?"

She worried at him with wide, dark eyes.

"That's just the trouble. I — don't remember any childhood. I remember only my great-great-grandmother. I never saw her, of course, but she's the only family I know about."

Big Bill's facial contortions finally caught the Saint's eye. They were something to watch. His mouth worked like a corkscrew, his eyebrows did a cancan.

"I gather," said the Saint mildly, "that you are giving me the hush-hush. I'm sorry, comrade, but I'm curious. Suppose you put in your two cents."

"I told you once," Big Bill said. "I told you the truth."

"Pish," Simon said. "Also, tush."

"It's true," Big Bill insisted. "I wouldn't lie to the Saint."

The girl echoed this in a voice of awe.

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"The Saint? The Robin Hood of Modern Crime, the Twentieth Century's brightest buccaneer, the" — she blushed — "the devil with dames."

It occurred to Simon, with a shock of remembrance, that her phrases were exactly those of Big Bill's when he learned his host's identity. And even then they had been far from new. The Saint thought of this for a moment, and rejected what it suggested. He shook his head.

"Let's consider that fire opal then, children. It's slightly fabulous, you know. Now, I don't think anybody knows more than I do about famous jools. Besides such well-known items as the Cullinan and the Hope diamonds, I am familiar with the history of almost every noteworthy bauble that was ever dug up. There's the Waters diamond, for example. No more than a half dozen persons know of its existence, its perfect golden flawless color. And the Chiang emerald, that great and beautiful stone that has been seen by only three living people, myself included. But this cameo opal is the damn warp of history. It couldn't be hidden for three generations without word of it getting out. In the course of time, I couldn't have helped hearing about it. But I didn't. . . . So it doesn't exist. But it does. I know it exists; I've held it in my hand ——"

"And put it in your pocket," Big Bill said.

The Saint felt in his jacket.

"So I did." He pulled out the chamois bag with its precious contents and made as if to toss it. "Here."

Big Bill stopped him with flared hands.

"Please keep it for me, Mr. Templar. Things will get rather bad around here soon. I don't want Appopoulis to get his fat hands on it."

"Soon? Surely not for a couple of hours."

Big Bill frowned.

"Things happen so quickly in dreams. This may *seem* real, but it'll still hold the screwy pattern you'd expect."

The Saint made a gesture of annoyance.

"Still sticking to your story? Well, maybe you're screwy or maybe you just think I am. But I'd rather face facts. As a matter of fact, I insist on it." He turned back to the girl. "For instance, darling, I know that you exist. I've kissed you."

Big Bill growled, glared, but did nothing as the Saint waited calmly.

Simon continued: "I have the evidence of my hands, lips, and eyes that you have all the common things in common with other women. In addition you have this incredible, unbelievable loveliness. When I look at you, I find it hard to believe that you're real. But that's only a figure of speech. My senses convince me. Yet you say you don't remember certain things that all people remember. Why?"

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She repeated her gesture of confusion.

"I — don't know. I can't remember any past."

"It would be a great privilege and a rare pleasure," the Saint said gently, "to provide you with a past to remember."

Another low growl rumbled in Big Bill's chest, and the Saint waited again for developments. None came, and it struck the Saint that all the characters in this muddled melodrama had one characteristic in common — a certain cowardice in the clutch. Even Dawn Winter showed signs of fear, and nobody had yet made a move to harm her. It was only another of the preposterous paradoxes that blended into the indefinable unreality of the whole.

Simon gave it up. If he couldn't get what he thought was truth from either of these two, he could watch and wait and divine the truth. Conflict hung on the wind, and conflict drags truth out of her hiding place and casts her naked before watching eyes.

"Well, souls," he said, "what now? The unholy three will be back sometime. You could go now. There is the wide black night to wander in."

"No," Big Bill said. "Now that you're in this, give us your help, Saint. We need you."

"Just what, then," Simon asked, "are we trying to prevent, or accomplish?"

"Selden Appopoulis must not get his hands on the opal or Dawn. He wants both. He'll stop at nothing to get them."

"I believe you mentioned a curse breathed on this gewgaw by some Oriental character."

Dawn Winter's voice once more tangled itself in Simon's heart. As long as he could remember that quality — of far-off bells at dusk, of 'cellos on a midnight hill — time would never again pass slowly enough.

"Death shall swoop on him," she chanted, "who holds this ancient gem from its true possessor, but all manner of things shall plague him before that dark dread angel shall come to rest at his shoulder. His nights shall be sleepless with terror, and hurts shall dog his accursed steps by day. Beauty shall bring an end to the vandal."

The mood of her strange incantation, far more than the actual words, seemed to linger on the air after she had finished, so that in spite of all rationality the Saint felt spectral fingers on his spine. He shook off the spell with conscious resolution.

"It sounds very impressive," he murmured, "in a gruesome sort of way. Reminds me of one of those zombie pictures. But where, may I ask, does this place me in the scheme of dire events? I have the jewel."

"You," Big Bill Holbrook said, "will die, as I must, and as Trailer Mac and Jimmy must. They stole it from Dawn; I stole it from them."

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The Saint smiled.

"Well, if that's settled, let's pass on to more entertaining subjects bordering on the carnal. Miss Winter, my car is just down the hill. If Bill is resigned to his fate, suppose we leave him and his playmates to their own fantastic devices and drift off into the night."

Her face haloed with pleasure.

"I'd like it," she said. "But I — I just can't."

"Why not? You're over three years old. Nobody is sitting on your chest."

"I can't do what I like, somehow," she said. "I can only do what I must. It's always that way."

"This," the Saint said to nobody in particular, "sounds like one of those stories that fellow Charteris might write. And what's the matter with you?" he demanded of Holbrook. "A little earlier you were eager to get banged about because I admired the lady. Now you sit with disgusting indifference to my indecent proposal. I assure you it was indecent, from your viewpoint."

Big Bill grinned.

"It just occurred to me. She can't go with you. She must do what she must. She can't get out of my sight. Good old Andy," he added.

The Saint turned his eyes away and stared into space, wondering. His wandering gaze focused on a small wall mirror that reflected Dawn Winter. Her features were blurred, run together, an amorphous mass. Simon wondered what could have happened to that mirror.

He swung back to face Bill Holbrook.

"I'm afraid," he said softly, but with the iron will showing through his velvet tones, "that we must have some truth in our little séance. Like the walrus, I feel the time has come to speak of many things. From this moment, you are my prisoners. The length of your durance vile depends on you. Who are you, Miss Winter?"

The look she turned on him made his hands tingle. Hers was a face for cupping between tender palms. Dark and troubled, her eyes pleaded for understanding, for sympathy.

"I told you all I know," she pleaded. "I've tried and tried, ever since I could remember anything, to think of — well, all those things you think of at times."

Again she passed a hand across her face, as if wiping away veils.

"I don't ever remember snagging a stocking on the way to an important appointment," she said. "And I know that girls do. I never had to fight for my" — she colored — "my honor, whatever that is. And I know that girls like me have fought for this something I don't understand, by the time they've reached my age. Whatever that is," she added pensively. "I don't even know how old I am, or where I've been."

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A pattern suddenly clicked into place in the Saint's brain, a pattern so monstrous, so inhuman as to arouse his destructive instincts to the point of homicidal mania. The look he turned on Big Bill Holbrook was ice and flame.

His voice was pitched at conversational level, but each word fell from his lips like a shining sword.

"Do you know," he said, "I'm beginning to get some new ideas. Not very nice ideas, chum. And if I'm guessing right about what you and your fellow scum have done to this innocent girl, you are liable to cost your insurance company money."

He moved toward Holbrook with a liquid grace that had all the co-ordination of a panther's movement — and the menace. Big Bill Holbrook leaned back from it.

"Stop acting the knight in armor," he protested. "What in hell you talking about?"

"It should have been obvious before," Simon Templar said. "Up on your feet, Holbrook."

Holbrook remained at ease.

"If you've got an explanation for all this that doesn't agree with mine, I want to know it."

The Saint paused. There was honest curiosity in the man's voice — and no fear. That cowardice which had characterized him before was replaced with what seemed an honest desire to hear the Saint's idea.

"This girl," the Saint said, "whoever she is, has breeding, grace, and beauty out of this world. She has been brought up under expensive and sheltered surroundings. You can see that in her every gesture, every expression. She was bred to great wealth, perhaps nobility, or even royalty."

Big Bill leaned forward in almost an agony of concentration. Every word of Simon Templar's might have been a $20 gold piece, the way he reached for it with every sense.

The Saint patted his jacket pocket.

"This jewel is the symbol of her position — heiress, princess, queen, or what have you. You and your unsavory companions kidnaped her, and are holding her for ransom. That would be wicked enough; but you've done worse. Somewhere in the course of your nasty little scheme, it seemed like a good idea to destroy a part of her beauty that could be dangerous to you and your precious pals. So you destroyed her mind. With drugs, I have no doubt — drugs that have dulled her mind until she has no memory. Your reasons are clear enough — it was just a sound form of insurance. And now your gang has split up, fighting over the spoils. I don't know who would have come out on top, if you hadn't happened to run into me. But I know

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what the end is going to be now — and you aren't going to like it. Get on your feet!"

The command was like a pistol shot, and Big Bill Holbrook jumped. Then he leaned back again and chuckled in admiration.

"Everything that's been said about you is true. There's nobody like you. That's so much better than Andy Faulks did there's no comparison. Say, that really would have been something, and look, it'd have explained why she couldn't remember who she was. Saint, I got to hand it to you. Too bad you're not in bed in Glendale."

For once of a very few times in his life, the Saint was taken aback. The words were spoken with such ease, such sincerity, that Simon's deadly purpose cooled to a feeling of confusion. While it is true that a man who is accustomed to danger, to gambling for high stakes with death as a forfeit could simulate feelings he did not actually feel, it is seldom that a man of Big Bill Holbrook's obvious I.Q. can look annihilation in the face with an admiring grin.

Something was still wrong, but wrong in the same way that everything in the whole episode was wrong — wrong with that same unearthly off-key distortion that defeated logical diagnosis.

The Saint took out a cigarette and lighted it, slowly; and over the hiss of the match he heard other sounds, which resolved themselves into a blur of footsteps.

Simon glanced at his watch. Jimmy and Mac had been gone less than half an hour. It was impossible for them to be returning from the village four miles away.

What had Holbrook said? Something about everything happening faster in dreams? But that was in the same vein of nonsense. Maybe they'd met the boss at the foot of the hill.

Holbrook said: "What is it? Did you hear something?"

"Only your friends again."

Fear came once more to Holbrook and Dawn Winter. Their eyes were wide and dark with it, turning instantly toward the bunk beds.

"No," Simon said. "Not this time. We'll have this out in the open."

"But he'll kill us!" Holbrook began to babble. "It's awful, the things he'll do. You don't know him, Saint. You can't imagine, you couldn't ——"

"I can imagine anything," said the Saint coldly. "I've been doing that for some time, and I'm tired of it. Now I'd prefer to know."

He crossed the room as the footsteps outside turned into knuckles at the door.

"Welcome to our study club," the Saint said.

Trailer Mac and Jimmy preceded an enormous hulk through the door

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and, when they saw Holbrook and Dawn, charged like lions leaping on paralyzed gazelles.

The Saint moved in a lightning blur. Two sharp cracks of fist on flesh piled Mac in one corner, Jimmy in another. They lay still.

A butter chuckle caused the Saint to turn. He was looking into a small circular hole. A .38, he computed. He raised his eyes to twins of the barrel, but these were eyes. They lay deep in flesh that swelled in yellowish-brown rolls, flowing fatly downward to describe one of the fattest men the Saint had ever seen. They could only have belonged to a man called Selden Appopoulis.

"Mr. Sydney Greenstreet, I presume?" Simon drawled.

The buttery chuckle set a sea of flesh ebbing and flowing.

"A quick action, sir, and an efficient direction of action. I compliment you, and am saddened that you must die."

The Saint shrugged. He knew that this fat man, though butter-voiced, had a heart of iridium. His eyes were the pale expressionless orbs of a killer. His mouth was thin with determination, his hand steady with purpose. But Simon had faced all those indications before.

"I hate to disappoint you, comrade," he said lightly, "but that line has a familiar ring. And yet I'm still alive."

Appopoulis appraised and dismissed the Saint, though his eyes never wavered. He spoke to Holbrook.

"The opal. Quickly!"

The butter of his voice had frozen into oleaginous icicles; and Holbrook quailed under the bite of their sharp edges.

"I haven't got it, Appopoulis. The Saint has it."

Simon was astonished at the change in the fat man. It was subtle, admittedly, but it was there nonetheless. Fear came into the pale gray eyes which had been calmly contemplating murder as a climax to unspeakable inquisitions. Fear and respect. The voice melted butter again.

"So," he said warmly. "Simon Templar, the Robin Hood of Modern Crime, the Twentieth Century's brightest buccaneer, the — ah — devil with dames. I had not anticipated this."

Once more it struck the Saint that the descriptive phrases were an exact repetition of Holbrook's. And once more it struck him that the quality of fear in this weird quintet was not strained. And once more he wondered about Holbrook's fantastic tale. . . .

"You are expecting maybe Little Lord Feigenbaum?" Simon asked. "Or what do you want?"

"The cameo opal, for one thing," Appopoulis said easily. "For the other, the girl."

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"And what do you intend to do with them?"

"Cherish them, sir. Both of them."

His voice had encyclopedic lust and greed, and the Saint felt as if small things crawled on him.

Before he could make an answer, stirrings in their respective corners announced the return of Mac and Jimmy to another common plane of existence. Without a word they got groggily to their feet, shook their heads clear of trip hammers, and moved toward the Saint.

"Now, Mr. Templar," said Appopoulis, "you have a choice. Live, and my desires are granted without violence, or die, and they are spiced with emotions at fever heat."

Mac and Jimmy had halted: one small and thunderstruck, one large and paralyzed.

"Boss," quavered Jimmy, "did youse say Templar? Da Saint?"

"The same." Simon bowed.

"Chee!" Mac breathed. "Da Saint. Da Robin Hood of Modern Crime, da ——"

"Please," Simon groaned. "Another record, if you don't mind."

"Boss, we ain't got a chanct," Jimmy said.

Appopoulis turned his eyes on the little man.

"He," the boss said, "has the opal."

This news stiffened their gelatinous spines long enough to set them at the Saint in a two-directional charge.

The Saint swerved to meet it. He held Jimmy between himself and the unwavering gun of Appopoulis with one hand. With the other he wrought havoc on the features of Mac.

It was like dancing, like feathers on the breeze, the way the Saint moved. Even to himself it had the kind of exhilaration that a fighter may only experience once in a lifetime. He had a sense of power, of supernatural coordination, of invincibility beyond anything he had ever known. He cared nothing for the knowledge that Appopoulis was skipping around on the outskirts of the fray, trying to find an angle from which he could terminate it with a well-placed shot. Simon knew that it was no fear of killing Jimmy that stayed the fat man's finger on the trigger — it was simply the knowledge that it would have wasted a shot, that the Saint could have gone on using Jimmy as a shield, alive or dead. The Saint knew this coolly and detachedly, as if with a mind separate from his own, while he battered Mac's face into a varicolored pulp.

Then Mac's eyes glazed and he went down; and the Saint's right hand snaked hipwards for his own gun while his left flung Jimmy bodily at the paunch of Appopoulis.

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And that was when the amazing, the incredible and impossible thing went wrong. For Jimmy didn't fly away from the Saint's thrust, as he should have, like a marble from a slingshot. Somehow he remained entangled with the Saint's arm, clinging to it as if bogged in some indissoluble birdlime, with a writhing tenacity that was as inescapable as a nightmare. And Simon looked down the barrel of Appopoulis's gun and saw the fat man's piggy eyes brighten with something that might have been lust. . . .

The Saint tried to throw a shot at him, but he was off balance, and the frenzied squirming of his erstwhile shield made it like trying to shoot from the back of a bucking horse. The bullet missed by a fraction of an inch, and buried itself in the wall beside the mirror. Then Appopoulis fired back.

The Saint felt a jar, and a flame roared inside his chest. Somehow, he couldn't pull the trigger any more. The gun fell from his limp fingers. His incredulous eyes looked full in the mirror and saw a neat black hole over his heart, saw it begin to spread as his life's blood gushed out.

It was strange to realize that this was it, and it had happened to him at last, as it had always been destined to happen someday, and in an instant he was going to cheat to the back of the book for the answer to the greatest mystery of all. Yet his last conscious thought was that his image was sharp and clear in the mirror. When he had seen Dawn's reflection, it had been like one seen in an agitated pool. . . .

When he opened his eyes again it was broad daylight, and the intensity of the light told him that it must have been more than twelve hours since he had been shot.

He was lying on the floor of the cabin. He felt for his heart. It was beating strongly. His hand did not come away sticky with blood.

His eyes turned hesitantly down to his shirt. There was no hole in it. He jumped to his feet, felt himself all over, examined himself in the mirror. He was as whole as he'd ever been; and he felt fine.

He looked around the cabin. The mattresses were piled in the corner under the pine cones, the bunks unmade. Otherwise there were no signs of the brawl the night before. No trace of Jimmy and Mac, or Appopoulis. No Big Bill Holbrook. No Dawn. . . .

And no hole in the wall beside the mirror where his hopeless shot at Appopoulis had buried itself.

The Saint shook his head. If it had all been a dream, he might have to seriously consider consulting a psychiatrist. Dreams reach only a certain point of vividness. What he remembered was too sharp of definition, too coherent, too consecutive. Yet if it wasn't a dream, where were the evidences of reality, the bullet hole in his chest, in the wall?

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Simon reached for a cigarette, and suddenly sniffed it suspiciously before he put it in his mouth. If some joker, either in fun or malice, had adulterated his tobacco with some more exotic herb . . . But that, too, was absurd. A jag of those dimensions would surely bequeath a hangover to match.

He fumbled in his pockets for a match. Instead, his questing fingers touched something solid, a shape that was oddly familiar — yet impossibly alien. The tactile sensation lasted only for an instant, before his hand recoiled as if the thing had been red hot. He was afraid, actually afraid, to take it out.

The address of Andrew Faulks was in the Glendale directory. The house was a modest two-bedroom affair on a side street near Forest Lawn Memorial Park. A wreath hung on the door. A solemn gentleman who looked like, and undoubtedly was, an undertaker opened the door.

"Mr. Faulks passed on last night," he said in answer to the Saint's query. Unctuous sorrow overlaid the immediate landscape.

"Wasn't it rather sudden?"

"Ah, not exactly, sir. He went to sleep last Saturday, passed into a coma, and never awakened."

"At what time," Simon asked, "did he die?"

"At 10:40," the man replied. "It was a sad death. He was in a delirium. He kept shouting about shooting someone, and talked about a saint."

Simon had moved into the house while listening to the tale of death and found himself looking off the hallway into a well-lighted den. His keen eyes noted that while most of the shelves were gay with the lurid jackets of adventure fiction, one section was devoted to works on psychology and psychiatry.

Here were the tomes of Freud, Adler, Jung, Brill, Bergson, Krafft-Ebing, and lesser lights. A book lay open on a small reading table.

The Saint stepped inside the room to look at it. It was titled *In Darkest Schizophrenia*, by William J. Holbrook, Ph.D.

Simon wondered what the psychic-phenomena boys would do with this one. This, he thought, would certainly give them a shot in the aura.

"Mrs. Faulks is upstairs, sir," the professional mourner was saying. "Are you a friend of the family?"

"I wish you'd just show her this." Simon forced one hand into a pocket. "And ask her——"

He never finished the question. Never.

There was nothing in the pocket for his hand to find. Nothing to meet his fingertips but a memory that was even then darkening and dying out along his nerves.

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Miss Idris Seabright, that canny lady, takes a shrewd look at the possibilities for extrapolation inherent in one of the most curious phenomena of our culture — our passion for joining organizations that guarantee to furnish us books, shirts, canned delicacies, fruits, even theater tickets the first of each and every month. As might be expected from the one who first recognized the profits to be realized from selling rope to Gnoles, Miss Seabright foresees an infinite expansion of such organizations. New planets, new systems, will mean new products for distribution to subscribers. And if there's an occasional error, like sending the wrong article to the wrong customer . . . . well, nobody's perfect.

An Egg a Month From All Over

by IDRIS SEABRIGHT

WHEN THE COLLECTOR from Consolidated Eggs found the mnxx bird egg on the edge of the cliff, he picked it up unsuspiciously. A molded mnxx bird egg looks almost exactly like the chu lizard eggs the collector was hunting, and this egg bore no visible sign of the treatment it had received at the hands of Jreel just before Krink's hatchet men caught up with him. The collector was paid by the egg; everything that came along was grist to his mill. He put the molded mnxx bird egg in his bag.

George Lidders lived alone in a cabin in the desert outside Phoenix. The cabin had only one room, but at least a third of the available space was taken up by an enormous incubator. George was a charter member of the Egg-of-the-Month Club, and he never refused one of their selections. He loved hatching eggs.

George had come to Phoenix originally with his mother for her health. He had taken care of her faithfully until her death, and now that she was gone, he missed her terribly. He had never spoken three consecutive words to any woman except her in his life. His fantasies, when he was base enough to have any, were pretty unpleasant. He was 46.

On Thursday morning he walked into Phoenix for his mail. As he scuffled over the sand toward the post office substation, he was hoping there would be a package for him from the Egg-of-the-Month Club. He was feeling

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tired, tired and depressed. He had been sleeping badly, with lots of nightmares. A nice egg package would cheer him up.

The South American mail rocket, cleaving the sky overhead, distracted him momentarily. If he had enough money, would he travel? Mars, Venus, star-side? No, he didn't think so. Travel wasn't really interesting. Eggs. . . . Eggs (but the thought was a little frightening), eggs were the only thing he had to go on living for.

The postmistress greeted him unsmilingly. "Package for you, Mr. Lidders. From the egg club. You got to brush for it." She handed him a slip.

George brushed, his hand shaking with excitement. This must be his lucky morning. It might even be a double selection; the package seemed unusually big. His lips began to lift at the corners. With a nod in place of thanks, he took the parcel from the postmistress, and went out, clutching it.

The woman looked after him disapprovingly. "I want you to stay away from that gesell, Fanny," she said to her eleven-year-old daughter, who was reading a postcard in the back of the cubicle. "There's something funny about him and his eggs."

"Oksey-snoksey, mums, if you say so. But lots of people hatch eggs."

The postmistress sniffed. "Not the way he hatches eggs," she said prophetically.

On the way home George tore the wrapper from the box. He couldn't wait any longer. He pulled back the flaps eagerly.

Inside the careful packing there was a large, an unusually large, pale blue-green egg. Its surface stood up in tiny bosses, instead of being smooth as eggs usually were, and the shell gave the impression of being more than ordinarily thick. According to the instructions with the parcel, it was a chu lizard egg from the planet Morx, a little-known satellite of Amorgos. It was to be incubated at a temperature of 76.3 centigrade with high humidity. It would hatch in about eight days.

George felt the surface of the egg lovingly. If only Mother were here to see it! She had always been interested in his egg hatching; it was the only thing he had ever wanted to do that she had really approved of. And this was an unusually interesting egg.

When he got home he went straight to the incubator. Tenderly he laid the soi-disant chu lizard egg in one of the compartments; carefully he adjusted temperature and heat. Then he sat down on the black and red afghan on his cot (his mother had crocheted the coverlet for him just before she passed away), and once more read the brochure that had come with the egg.

When he had finished it, he sighed. It was too bad there weren't any other eggs in the incubator now, eggs that were on the verge of hatching. Eight days was a long time to wait. But this egg looked wonderfully promising;

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he didn't know when the club had sent out an egg that attracted him so. And from one point of view it was a good thing he hadn't any hatchings on hand. Hatching, for all its excitement, was a sort of ordeal. It always left him feeling nervously exhausted and weak.

He had lunch, and after lunch, lying under the red and black afghan, he had a little nap. When he woke it was late afternoon. He went over to the incubator and looked in. The egg hadn't changed. He hadn't expected it would.

His nap hadn't cheered or refreshed him. He was almost tireder than he had been when he lay down to sleep. Sighing, he went around to the other side of the incubator and stared at the cage where he kept the things he had hatched out. After a moment he took his eyes away. They weren't interesting, really — lizards and birds and an attractive small snake or two. He wasn't interested in the things that were in eggs after they had hatched out.

In the evening he read a couple of chapters in the *Popular Guide to Egg Hatchery*.

He woke early the next morning, his heart hammering. He'd had another of those nightmares. But — his mind wincingly explored the texture of the dream — but it hadn't been all nightmare. There'd been a definitely pleasurable element in it, and the pleasure had been somehow connected with the egg that had come yesterday. Funny. (Jreel, who had molded the mnxx bird egg from its original cuboid into the present normal ovoid shape, wouldn't have found it funny at all.) It was funny about dreams.

He got grapes from the cupboard and made cafecreme on the hotplate. He breakfasted. After breakfast he looked at his new egg.

The temperature and humidity were well up. It was about time for him to give the egg a quarter of a turn, as the hatching instruction booklet suggested. He reached in the compartment, and was surprised to find it full of a dry, brisk, agreeable warmth. It seemed to be coming from the egg.

How odd! He stood rubbing the sprouting whiskers on his upper lip. After a moment he tapped the two gauges. No, the needles weren't stuck; they wobbled normally. He went around to the side of the incubator and checked the connections. Everything was sound and tight, nothing unusual. He must have imagined the dry warmth. Rather apprehensively, he put his hand back in the compartment — he still hadn't turned the egg — and was relieved to find the air in it properly humid. Yes, he must have imagined it.

After lunch he cleaned the cabin and did little chores. Abruptly, when he was half through drying the lunch dishes, the black depression that had threatened him ever since Mother died swallowed him up. It was like a physical blackness; he put down the dish undried and groped his way over to a chair. For a while he sat almost unmoving, his hands laced over his

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little stomach, while he sank deeper and deeper into despair. Mother was gone; he was 46; he had nothing to live for, not a thing. . . . He escaped from the depression at last, with a final enormous guilty effort, into one of his more unpleasant fantasies. The imago within the molded mnxx bird egg, still plastic within its limey shell, felt the strain and responded to it with an inaudible grunt.

On the third day of the hatching, the egg began to enlarge. George hung over the incubator, fascinated. He had seen eggs change during incubation before, of course. Sometimes the shells got dry and chalky; sometimes they were hygroscopic and picked up moisture from the air. But he had never seen an egg act like this one. It seemed to be swelling up like an inflating balloon.

He reached in the compartment and touched the egg lightly. The shell, that had been so limey and thick when he first got it, was now warm and yielding and gelatinous. There was something uncanny about it. Involuntarily, George rubbed his fingers on his trouser leg.

He went back to the incubator at half-hour intervals. Every time it seemed to him that the egg was a little bigger than it had been. It was wonderfully interesting; he had never seen such a fascinating egg.

He got out the hatching instructions booklet and studied it. No, there was nothing said about changes in shell surface during incubation, and nothing about the egg's incredible increase in size. And the booklets were usually careful about mentioning such things. The directors of the Egg-of-the-Month Club didn't want their subscribers to overlook anything interesting that would happen during the incubation days. They wanted you to get your money's worth.

There must be some mistake. George, booklet in hand, stared at the incubator doubtfully. Perhaps the egg had been sent him by mistake; perhaps he hadn't been meant to have it. (He was right in both these suppositions: Jreel had meant the egg for Krink, as a little gift.) Perhaps he ought to get rid of the egg. An unauthorized egg might be dangerous.

Hesitantly he raised the incubator lid. It would be a shame, but — yes, he'd throw the egg out. Anything, anything at all might be inside an egg. There was no sense in taking chances. He approached his hand. The imago, dimly aware that it was at a crucial point in its affairs, exerted itself.

George's hand halted a few inches from the egg. He had broken into a copious sweat, and his forearm was one large cramp. Why, he must have been crazy. He didn't want — he couldn't possibly want to — get rid of the egg. What had been the matter with him? He perceived very clearly now what he thought he must have sensed dimly all along: that there was a wonderful promise in the egg.

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A promise of what? Of — he couldn't be sure — but of warmth, of sleep, of rest. A promise of something he'd been wanting all his life. He couldn't be any more specific than that. But if what he thought might be in the egg was actually there, it wouldn't matter any more that Mother was dead and that he was 46 and lonely. He'd — he gulped and sighed deeply — he'd be happy. Satisfied.

The egg kept on enlarging, though more slowly, until late that evening. Then it stopped.

George was in a froth of nervous excitement. In the course of watching the egg's slow growth, he had chewed his fingernails until three of them were down to the quick and ready to bleed. Still keeping his eyes fixed on the egg, he went to the dresser, got a nail file, and began to file his nails. The operation soothed him. By 12, when it became clear that nothing more was going to happen immediately, he was calm enough to go to bed. He had no dreams.

The fourth and fifth days passed without incident. On the sixth day George perceived that though the egg was of the same size, its shell had hardened and become once more opaque. And on the eighth day — to this extent the molded mnxx bird egg was true to the schedule laid down in the booklet for the chu lizard — the egg began to crack.

George felt a rapturous excitement. He hovered over the incubator breathlessly, his hands clutching the air and water conduits for support. As the tiny fissure enlarged, he kept gasping and licking his lips. He was too agitated to be capable of coherent thought, but it occurred to him that what he really expected to come out of the egg was a bird of some sort, some wonderful, wonderful bird.

The faint pecking from within the egg grew louder. The dark fissure on the pale blue-green background widened and spread. The halves of the shell fell back suddenly, like the halves of a door. The egg was open. There was nothing inside.

Nothing. Nothing. For a moment George felt that he had gone mad. He rubbed his eyes and trembled. Disappointment and incredulity were sickening him. He picked up the empty shell.

It was light and chalky and faintly warm to the touch. He felt inside it unbelievingly. There was nothing there.

His frustration was stifling. For a moment he thought of crumpling up newspapers and setting the cabin on fire. Then he put the halves of the shell down on the dresser and went wobblingly toward the door. He'd — go for a walk.

The mnxx bird imago, left alone within the cabin, flitted about busily.

The moon had risen when George got back. In the course of his miserable

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wanderings, he had stopped on a slight rise and shed a few sandy tears. Now he was feeling, if not better, somewhat more resigned. His earlier hopes, his later disappointment, had been succeeded by a settled hopelessness.

The mnxx bird was waiting behind the door of the cabin for him.

In its flittings in the cabin during his absence, it had managed to assemble for itself a passable body. It had used newspapers, grapes, and black wool from the afghan as materials. What it had made was short and squat and excessively female, not at all alluring, but it thought George would like it. It held the nail file from the dresser in its one completed hand.

George shut the cabin door behind him. His arm moved toward the light switch. He halted, transfixed by the greatest of the surprises of the day. He saw before him, glimmering wanly in the moonlight from the window, the woman of his — let's be charitable — dreams.

She was great-breasted, thighed like an idol. Her face was only a blur; there the mnxx bird had not felt it necessary to be specific. But she moved toward George with a heavy sensual swaying; she was what George had always wanted and been ashamed of wanting. She was here. He had no questions. She was his. Desire was making him drunk. He put out his hands.

The newspaper surface, so different from what he had been expecting, startled him. He uttered a surprised cry. The mnxx bird saw no reason for waiting any longer. George was caressing one grape-tipped breast uncertainly. The mnxx raised its right arm, the one that was complete, and drove the nail file into his throat.

The mnxx bird was amazed at the amount of blood in its victim. Jreel, when he had been molding the imago with his death wishes for Krink, had said nothing about this. The inhabitants of the planet Morx do not have much blood.

After a momentary disconcertment, the mnxx went on with its business. It had, after all, done what it had been molded to do. Now there awaited it a more personal task.

It let the woman's body it had shaped collapse behind it carelessly. The newspapers made a whuffing sound. In a kind of rapture it threw itself on George. His eyes would be admirable for mnxx bird eyes, it could use his skin, his hair, his teeth. Admirable material! Trembling invisibly with the joy of creation, the mnxx bird set to work.

When it had finished, George lay on the sodden carpet flaccidly. His eyes were gone, and a lot of his vital organs. Things were over for him. He had had, if not all he wanted, all he was ever going to get. He was quiet. He was dead. He was satisfied.

The mnxx bird, on the fine strong wings it had plaited for itself out of George's head hair, floated out into the night.

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Recommended Reading

by THE EDITORS

THE International Fantasy Awards committee, expanded this year to a truly representative group of scholars, critics and writers from five countries, has chosen a splendid batch of books from those published in 1951; we'd like to add a hearty concurring opinion, urging you, if by some sad chance you've missed any of the books honored, to remedy that error without delay.

The Award for fiction went to John Collier's FANCIES AND GOODNIGHTS (Doubleday), which also recently received the Mystery Writers of America's Edgar for short crime stories. Both awards are precisely just; the volume contains pure masterpieces in each field. Fiction runners-up were John Wyndham's THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS and Ray Bradbury's THE ILLUSTRATED MAN — both also from Doubleday!

In the non-fiction division, second and third places went to two books strongly commended in the past in this column. Willy Ley's DRAGONS IN AMBER (Viking) and Jack Coggins' and Fletcher Pratt's ROCKETS, JETS, GUIDED MISSILES AND SPACE SHIPS (Random). The Award proper was bestowed, however, on a book which only now reaches the American reviewer; for these International Awards go according to the year of publication in the original country.

Arthur C. Clarke's THE EXPLORATION OF SPACE (Harper), published in England in 1951, makes American publishing history in 1952 by becoming the first work of future space travel (in fiction or fact) to be chosen by the Book-of-the-Month Club. The choice is richly deserved. Less technical and more (in the best sense) popular than Clarke's own INTERPLANETARY FLIGHT, shorter and simpler (if a trifle less entertaining) than Ley's classic ROCKETS, MISSILES AND SPACE TRAVEL, replete with stimulating fresh ideas and corrections of common fictional misconceptions, it is a perfect introduction to the subject for the Club's subscribers, and not merely recommended but required reading for F&SF's audience — and hopeful contributors.

Mr. Ley himself, meanwhile, briefly abandons the topic of space travel to produce with L. Sprague de Camp a completely enchanting non-fiction work: LANDS BEYOND (Rinehart). This fascinating documentation of man's credulity concerning *terrae incognitae*, from Atlantis through the Kingdom

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of Prester John to the Lemurian colony on Mount Shasta, is written with scholarly authority, literary grace, and an amusedly tolerant exposition of error, to make one of the season's most enjoyable items.

1952 will be a truly memorable year if it produces a stronger candidate for the International Award than Clifford Simak's CITY (Gnome). Simak's wonderful tales of the dogs who inherit the earth (after man goes to Jupiter) have been woven into a solid, self-sustaining book by the scholarly commentary of a Dog editor of the infinitely remote future. The stories will be a delight for old-timers to reread; those lucky people just discovering them will quickly realize why these tales are a high-water mark in science fiction writing. Both kinds of readers will find the notes and comment (about 6000 words of new material) of the canine editor, who isn't sure whether the chronicles are history or myth, utterly convincing. Here is a book that caused these reviewers to chuck objective detachment out the window and emit a loud, partisan "Whee!" You all remember Lewis Padgett's amiable inebriate, Galloway Gallegher, who played science by ear . . . and by the bottle. In ROBOTS HAVE NO TAILS (Gnome) we have a complete listing of his scientific "discoveries" and a great joy it is to have them all to hand. No attempt has been made to create of these stories a unified whole, nor is it easy to take them all in one lump, but that's minor carping. Padgett's position as the one great humorist of science fiction is still unchallenged.

In full-length science fiction novels, the most interesting recent event has been the revival of a "lost" 1919 serial, Francis Stevens' THE HEADS OF CERBERUS (Polaris), a slightly dated but still originally imaginative and acutely satiric story of time travel in alternate worlds. Lloyd Arthur Eshbach plans a series of such rediscoveries, which can be ordered only directly from Polaris Press, 120 N. 9th St., Reading, Pennsylvania; as limited editions of 1500 copies, singularly well made and (aside from the illustrations) beautifully designed, they are a collector's bargain at $3. Another resurrected serial, this time of 1931/32, Anthony Gilmore's SPACE HAWK (Greenberg), can hardly be taken seriously, but is strongly commended to all connoisseurs of prose so outrageously bad as to reach its own kind of greatness. Anthony West's ANOTHER KIND (Houghton, Mifflin) represents a highly interesting new approach; an extrapolated future (civil war and a People's Republic in England) used simply as background for a straight novel, just as a novel might be set during World War II without being a "war novel." Unfortunately the novel itself, despite a few brilliantly written scenes, is a cumbersome and unconvincing one, well below the standards of Mr. West's memorable THE VINTAGE.

A sort of in-between book of science fiction, neither a strung together collection of shorts nor an out-and-out novel, is that new venture of the

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Messrs. Everett E. Bleiler and T. E. Dikty, THE YEAR'S BEST SCIENCE FICTION NOVELS: *1952* (Fell). These able editors feel — and rightly so — that the short science fiction novel — or long novelet — has been a form too long neglected by book publishers and anthologists. They seek to remedy this with an annual selection which, if this volume is any criterion, will rank right along with these editors' yearly BEST volumes of shorts. We'd suggest you skip the first inclusion — *all* editors err on occasion — and go directly to Eric Frank Russell's splendid . . . *And Then There Were None.* This best of Russell is the best in the book, but it's closely followed by Arthur C. Clarke's (that ubiquitous scrivener!) *Seeker Of The Sphinx.*

There is no phase of imaginative literature that has not been enriched by some creation of the mind and hand of Gerald Heard. His latest book, GABRIEL AND THE CREATURES (Harper), is hard to classify: it is good, solid science — a dynamic new concept of the evolution of the mammals — told within the framework of a fantasy-allegory. Heard has mastered that most difficult of the writer's many problems, the telling of a factual story by fictional means. After you have read and reread this book, we suggest another savoring by your reading it aloud to any small fry who are just developing an interest in natural history. A story whose characters are pleasingly reminiscent of both Gabriel's adventurers and Pogo's neighbors is HIGH WATER AT CATFISH BEND by Ben Lucien Burman (Messner). It's a pleasant tale of how certain animals get together to induce man to make sense about flood control. The animals are never "cute" and the allegory is never over-plugged; if this isn't folklore, it ought to be! Marcel Aymé's THE SECOND FACE (Harper) is by no means the best work of that Gallic wit and fantasist. The consequences of suddenly finding yourself with a new and more seductive face are amusingly and logically explored; but the idea and plot are barely enough for a long short story, and hardly adequate for a full-scale novel.

The only recent reprint of interest is the Everyman's Library reissue of George Du Maurier's imperishable TRILBY (Dutton), with the author's own illustrations and a preface by his son, the polished actor Sir Gerald Du Maurier. Specialist-collectors will wish to add to their shelves Darrell C. Richardson's MAX BRAND, THE MAN AND HIS WORK (FPCI), weak as a critico-biographical symposium but stunning as a bibliography of that incredibly prolific writer, and Joseph Payne Brennan's H. P. LOVECRAFT: A BIBLIOGRAPHY (Biblio Press), which includes a very few items overlooked by August Derleth in his standard memoir of H. P. L.

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One of the many reasons for our affection for our fellow editor H. L. Gold is the fact that he introduced us to Doris Buck. You will see longer stories of Mrs. Buck's in these pages later, but few more striking than this short and sharp item which marks her debut as a fiction writer.

Aunt Agatha

by DORIS P. BUCK

SHE WAS not the one he had hoped to see that night. But because the young man was savoring old sights and sounds, and all that is quickly forgotten on the other side of the grave, he turned his attention briefly to the woman seated in the remembered room. She wasn't old. But the eyes under her graying hair had lost their fire, making her seem older than she was. She kept those eyes steadily fixed on him, nor did her lids flicker. She accepted him — he supposed — as she had accepted odd new pieces of furniture in her room; as perhaps she accepted the even odder painting, all cubes and circles, that hung in the place of — Wasn't it a drab watercolor?

His wife's Aunt Agatha, he thought. Memories rushed back. He said in sheer surprise, "I never imagined you'd change this place. I always thought of you, Aunt Agatha, as . . . oh, set in your ways; and this —" He shrugged and glanced at one beautiful shell on an asymmetrical table. He sighed a little. "It must be fun to be alive now."

"Some think it is."

"But I didn't come back," he explained swiftly, "to talk to you. I came to see Connie." Once more he looked around the room. "Connie must have egged you into making all these changes. She was always so full of life, so ready to — to do anything."

"Yes, anything." Her voice was quietly bitter.

The young man paid little attention. He asked with urgency, "Connie — my wife — does she still live with you as the two of us did when I was alive?" He looked at the woman's handsome, impassive face for a clue; at the eyes that were black but not brilliant, the hawklike nose, the finely cut mouth. But there was no clue in them. They held only one comment on the universe, on all that was in it. They said, *I am tired of you.* Nothing more.

The young man cried to that baffling face, "Tonight Connie thought

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of me — hard, hard. It must have been that way. She brought me back. I always knew she would. I must see Connie."

"To haunt her?" The woman's voice was flat.

The young man went toward her impulsively. "Who are you to judge Connie?" he demanded. "You — an old, staid woman — less alive than I am! Don't you know that Connie made her own laws? Only by those could she live. Perhaps tonight she'll laugh at me, laugh harder and more bitterly than the night she killed me. Perhaps even now she'll taunt me with Robert. I can still hear her tell what Robert meant to her. And I don't care. I came back to Connie, not to haunt her, but because someone as vibrant as Connie draws people, because —"

She tried to hush him with her hand but he went on, "Aunt Agatha, help me. Earth is strange to me. I don't know what year it is, nor any of the things that happened after I was poisoned. Where is Robert now? And . . . and Connie?" Suddenly his lips twisted. "Connie! Constance! Why did anyone name her Constance?"

The murdered man walked to and fro, his footfalls soundless but his eyes bright with excitement. "My wife was Carmen. That's what they ought to have called her. Maybe I should have fought with a woman like that — whipped the gipsy out of her."

The woman's middle-aged eyes suddenly turned ugly. He felt her look him all over with envy.

"How young you are!" she muttered.

"You always said that. Connie and I used to laugh at it." The corners of his eyes crinkled, for elderly aunts are elderly aunts no matter on which side of the grave a man stands. Then he grew earnest. "Tell me, Aunt Agatha, did they — did they punish her?"

"Could anyone punish your wild Carmen but Carmen herself?"

"Don't ask me questions. My time — I know it will be brief, though I've almost forgotten time's strange workings. I thought that I'd see Connie right away."

The woman got up. "Go away! Go away! I'll make you." If her low voice had been a shout it could not have been more startling. "Take your damned youth out of my place!"

He stared at her in amazement. She no longer saw him; he was sure of that. She rubbed her eyes sleepily, as she half listened to a man's petulant growl from the bedroom. She waited for the man's "Aren't you ever coming, Connie?" before she called back through a yawn:

"Yes, Robert, in a minute."

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Since we have always tried to stress the contributions of women writers to science fiction, it's not surprising that many of our most popular "first" stories should be by women; but it is somewhat surprising that probably the two most popular of all our discoveries have been Arizona women: Mildred Clingerman and Zenna Henderson. The Arizona State Chamber of Commerce is hereby offered a free testimonial on the singular warmth and originality of the new writers which that state produces. Long after its publication your letters have kept on praising Miss Henderson's Come On, Wagon! *(F&SF, December, 1951); her second appearance here is with a story three times as long and, we venture to think, three times as effective as even that small classic. Its theme is too subtly revealed in the story itself to mention in an introduction. We'll only express our gratitude that Zenna Henderson is a schoolteacher by profession; no one else could have conceived or written this story, which on each editorial rereading we have found more deeply moving.*

Ararat

by ZENNA HENDERSON

WE'VE HAD TROUBLE with teachers in Cougar Canyon. It's just an Accommodation school anyway, isolated and so unhandy to anything. There's really nothing to hold a teacher. But the way The People bring forth their young, in quantities and with regularity, even our small Group can usually muster the nine necessary for the County School Superintendent to arrange for the schooling for the year.

Of course I'm past school age, Canyon school age, and have been for years, but if the tally came up one short in the Fall, I'd go back for a post-graduate course again. But now I'm working on a college level because Father finished me off for my high school diploma two summers ago. He's promised me that if I do well this year I'll get to go Outside next year and get my training and degree so I can be the teacher and we won't have to go Outside for one any more. Most of the kids would just as soon skip school as not, but the Old Ones don't hold with ignorance and the Old Ones have the last say around here.

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Father is the head of the school board. That's how I get in on lots of school things the other kids don't. This summer when he wrote to the County Seat that we'd have more than our nine again this fall and would they find a teacher for us, he got back a letter saying they had exhausted their supply of teachers who hadn't heard of Cougar Canyon and we'd have to dig up our own teacher this year. That "dig up" sounded like a dirty crack to me since we have the graves of four past teachers in the far corner of our cemetery. They sent us such old teachers, the homeless, the tottering, who were trying to piece out the end of their lives with a year here and a year there in jobs no one else wanted because there's no adequate pension system in the state and most teachers seem to die in harness. And their oldness and their tottering were not sufficient in the Canyon where there are apt to be shocks for Outsiders — unintentional as most of them are.

We haven't done so badly the last few years, though. The Old Ones say we're getting adjusted — though some of the non-conformists say that The Crossing thinned our blood. It might be either or both or the teachers are just getting tougher. The last two managed to last until just before the year ended. Father took them in as far as Kerry Canyon and ambulances took them on in. But they were all right after a while in the sanatorium and they're doing okay now. Before them, though, we usually had four teachers a year.

Anyway, Father wrote to a Teachers Agency on the coast and after several letters each way, he finally found a teacher.

He told us about it at the supper table.

"She's rather young," he said, reaching for a toothpick and tipping his chair back on its hind legs.

Mother gave Jethro another helping of pie and picked up her own fork again. "Youth is no crime," she said, "and it'll be a pleasant change for the children."

"Yes, though it seems a shame." Father prodded at a back tooth and Mother frowned at him. I wasn't sure if it was for picking his teeth or for what he said. I knew he meant it seemed a shame to get a place like Cougar Canyon so early in a career. It isn't that we're mean or cruel, you understand. It's only that they're Outsiders and we sometimes forget — especially the kids.

"She doesn't *have* to come," said Mother. "She could say no."

"Well, now —" Father tipped his chair forward. "Jethro, no more pie. You go on out and help 'Kiah bring in the wood. Karen, you and Lizbeth get started on the dishes. Hop to it, kids."

And we hopped, too. Kids do to fathers in the Canyon, though I under-

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stand they don't always Outside. It annoyed me because I knew Father wanted us out of the way so he could talk adult talk to Mother, so I told Lizbeth I'd clear the table and then worked as slowly as I could, and as quietly, listening hard.

"She couldn't get any other job," said Father. "The agency told me they had placed her twice in the last two years and she didn't finish the year either place."

"Well," said Mother, pinching in her mouth and frowning. "If she's that bad, why on earth did you hire her for the Canyon?"

"We have a choice?" laughed Father. Then he sobered. "No, it wasn't for incompetency. She was a good teacher. The way she tells it, they just fired her out of a clear sky. She asked for recommendations and one place wrote, 'Miss Carmody is a very competent teacher but we dare not recommend her for a teaching position.' "

" 'Dare not'?" asked Mother.

" 'Dare not,' " said Father. "The Agency assured me that they had investigated thoroughly and couldn't find any valid reasons for the dismissals, but she can't seem to find another job anywhere on the coast. She wrote me that she wanted to try another state."

"Do you suppose she's disfigured or deformed?" suggested Mother.

"Not from the neck up!" laughed Father. He took an envelope from his pocket. "Here's her application picture."

By this time I'd got the table cleared and I leaned over Father's shoulder.

"Gee!" I said. Father looked back at me, raising one eyebrow. I knew then that he had known all along that I was listening.

I flushed but stood my ground, knowing I was being granted admission to adult affairs, if only by the back door.

The girl in the picture was lovely. She couldn't have been many years older than I and she was twice as pretty. She had short dark hair curled all over her head and apparently that poreless creamy skin that seems to have an inner light of itself. She had a tentative look about her as though her dark eyebrows were horizontal question marks. There was a droop to the corners of her mouth — not much, just enough to make you wonder why . . . and want to comfort her.

"She'll stir the Canyon for sure," said Father.

"I don't know," Mother frowned thoughtfully. "What will the Old Ones say to a marriageable Outsider in the Canyon?"

"Adonday Veeah!" muttered Father. "That never occurred to me. None of our other teachers were ever of an age to worry about."

"What *would* happen?" I asked. "I mean if one of The Group married an Outsider?"

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"Impossible," said Father, so like the Old Ones that I could see why his name was approved in Meeting last Spring.

"Why, there's even our Jemmy," worried Mother. "Already he's saying he'll have to start trying to find another Group. None of the girls here please him. Supposing this Outsider — how old is she?"

Father unfolded the application. "Twenty-three," he said, "Just three years out of college."

"Jemmy's twenty-four," said Mother, pinching her mouth together. "Father, I'm afraid you'll have to cancel the contract. If anything happened — Well, you waited over-long to become an Old One to my way of thinking and it'd be a shame to have something go wrong your first year."

"I can't cancel the contract. She's on her way here. School starts next Monday." Father ruffled his hair forward as he does when he's disturbed. "We're probably making a something of a nothing," he said hopefully.

"Well I only hope we don't have any trouble with this Outsider."

"Or she with us," grinned Father. "Where are my cigarettes?"

"On the book case," said Mother, getting up and folding the table cloth together to hold the crumbs.

Father snapped his fingers and the cigarettes drifted in from the front room.

Mother went on out to the kitchen. The table cloth shook itself over the waste basket and then followed her.

Father drove to Kerry Canyon Sunday night to pick up our new teacher. She was supposed to have arrived Saturday afternoon, but she didn't make bus connections at the County Seat. The road ends at Kerry Canyon. I mean for Outsiders. There's not much of the look of a well-traveled road very far out our way from Kerry Canyon, which is just as well. Tourists leave us alone. Of course *we* don't have much trouble getting our cars to and fro but that's why everything dead-ends at Kerry Canyon and we have to do all our own fetching and carrying — I mean the road being in the condition it is.

All the kids at our house wanted to stay up to see the new teacher, so Mother let them; but by 7:30 the youngest ones began to drop off and by 9 there was only Jethro and 'Kiah, Lizbeth and Jemmy and me. Father should have been home long before and Mother was restless and uneasy. I knew if he didn't arrive soon, she would head for her room and the cedar box under the bed. But at 9:15 we heard the car coughing and sneezing up the draw. Mother's wide relieved smile was reflected on all our faces.

"Of course!" she cried. "I forgot. He has an Outsider in the car. He had to use the *road* and it's terrible across Jackass Flat."

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I felt Miss Carmody before she came in the door. I was tingling all over from anticipation already, but all at once I felt her, so plainly that I knew with a feeling of fear and pride that I was of my Grandmother, that soon I would be bearing the burden and blessing of her Gift: the Gift that develops into free access to any mind — one of The People or Outsider — willing or not. And besides the access, the ability to council and help, to straighten tangled minds and snarled emotions.

And then Miss Carmody stood in the doorway, blinking a little against the light, muffled to the chin against the brisk fall air. A bright scarf hid her hair but her skin *was* that luminous matt-cream it had looked. She was smiling a little, but scared, too. I shut my eyes and . . . I went in — just like that. It was the first time I had ever sorted anybody. She was all fluttery with tiredness and strangeness and there was a question deep inside her that had the wornness of repetition, but I couldn't catch what it was. And under the uncertainty there was a sweetness and dearness and such a bewildered sorrow that I felt my eyes dampen. Then I looked at her again (sorting takes such a little time) as Father introduced her. I heard a gasp beside me and suddenly I went into Jemmy's mind with a stunning rush.

Jemmy and I have been close all our lives and we don't always need words to talk with one another, but this was the first time I had ever gone in like this and I knew he didn't know what had happened. I felt embarrassed and ashamed to know his emotion so starkly. I closed him out as quickly as possible, but not before I knew that now Jemmy would never hunt for another Group; Old Ones or no Old Ones, he had found his love.

All this took less time than it takes to say "How do you do?" and shake hands. Mother descended with cries and drew Miss Carmody and Father out to the kitchen for coffee and Jemmy swatted Jethro and made him carry the luggage instead of snapping it to Miss Carmody's room. After all, we didn't want to lose our teacher before she even saw the school house.

I waited until everyone was bedded down. Miss Carmody in her cold, cold bed, the rest of us of course with our sheets set for warmth — how I pity Outsiders! Then I went to Mother.

She met me in the dark hall and we clung together as she comforted me.

"Oh Mother," I whispered. "I sorted Miss Carmody tonight. I'm afraid."

Mother held me tight again. "I wondered," she said. "It's a great responsibility. You have to be so wise and clear-thinking. Your Grandmother carried the Gift with graciousness and honor. You are of her. You can do it."

"But Mother! To be an Old One!"

Mother laughed. "You have years of training ahead of you before you'll be an Old One. Councilor to the soul is a weighty job."

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"Do I have to tell?" I pleaded. "I don't want anyone to know yet. I don't want to be set apart."

"I'll tell the Oldest," she said, "No one else need know." She hugged me again and I went back, comforted, to bed.

I lay in the darkness and let my mind clear, not even knowing how I knew how to. Like the gentle reachings of quiet fingers I felt the family about me. I felt warm and comfortable as though I were cupped in the hollow palm of a loving hand. Some day I would belong to the Group as I now belonged to the family. Belong to others? With an odd feeling of panic, I shut the family out. I wanted to be alone — to belong just to me and no one else. I didn't *want* the Gift.

I slept after a while.

Miss Carmody left for the school house an hour before we did. She wanted to get things started a little before school time, her late arrival making it kind of rough on her. 'Kiah, Jethro, Lizbeth and I walked down the lane to the Armisters' to pick up their three kids. The sky was so blue you could taste it, a winey, fallish taste of harvest fields and falling leaves. We were all feeling full of bubbly enthusiasm for the beginning of school. We were light-hearted and light-footed, too, as we kicked along through the cottonwood leaves paving the lane with gold. In fact Jethro felt too light-footed and the third time I hauled him down and made him walk on the ground, I cuffed him good. He was still sniffling when we got to Armisters'.

"She's pretty!" called Lizbeth before the kids got out to the gate, all agog and eager for news of the new teacher.

"She's young," added 'Kiah, elbowing himself ahead of Lizbeth.

"She's littler'n me," sniffed Jethro and we all laughed because he's five-six already even if he isn't twelve yet.

Debra and Rachel Armister linked arms with Lizbeth and scuffled down the lane, heads together, absorbing the details of teacher's hair, dress, nail polish, luggage and night clothes, though goodness knows how Lizbeth knew anything about that.

Jethro and 'Kiah annexed Jeddy and they climbed up on the rail fence that parallels the lane and walked the top rail. Jethro took a tentative step or two above the rail, caught my eye and stepped back in a hurry. He knows as well as any child in the Canyon that a kid his age has no business lifting along a public road.

We detoured at the Mesa Road to pick up the Kroginold boys. More than once Father has sighed over the Kroginolds.

You see, when The Crossing was made, The People got separated in that last wild moment when air was screaming past and the heat was building up

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so alarmingly. The members of our Group left their ship just seconds before it crashed so devastatingly into the box canyon behind Old Baldy and literally splashed and drove itself into the canyon walls, starting a fire that stripped the hills bare for miles. After The People gathered themselves together from the Life Slips and founded Cougar Canyon, they found that the alloy the ship was made of was a metal much wanted here. Our Group has lived on mining the box canyon ever since, though there's something complicated about marketing the stuff. It has to be shipped out of the country and shipped in again because everyone knows that it doesn't occur in this region.

Anyway, our Group at Cougar Canyon is probably the largest of the People, but we are reasonably sure that at least one Group and maybe two survived along with us. Grandmother in her time sensed two Groups but could never locate them exactly and, since our object is to go unnoticed in this new life, no real effort has ever been made to find them. Father can remember just a little of The Crossing, but some of the Old Ones are blind and crippled from the heat and the terrible effort they put forth to save the others from burning up like falling stars.

But getting back, Father often said that of all The People who could have made up our Group, we had to get the Kroginolds. They're rebels and were even before The Crossing. It's their kids that have been so rough on our teachers. The rest of us usually behave fairly decently and remember that we have to be careful around Outsiders.

Derek and Jake Kroginold were wrestling in a pile of leaves by the front gate when we got there. They didn't even hear us coming, so I leaned over and whacked the nearest rear-end and they turned in a flurry of leaves and grinned up at me for all the world like pictures of Pan in the mythology book at home.

"What kinda old bat we got this time?" asked Derek as he scrabbled in the leaves for his lunch box.

"She's not an old bat," I retorted, madder than need be because Derek annoys me so. "She's young and beautiful."

"Yeah, I'll bet!" Jake emptied the leaves from his cap onto the trio of squealing girls.

"She is so!" retorted 'Kiah. "The nicest teacher we ever had."

"She won't teach me nothing!" yelled Derek, lifting to the top of the cottonwood tree at the turn-off.

"Well, if she won't, I will," I muttered and, reaching for a handful of sun, I platted the twishers so quickly that Derek fell like a rock. He yelled like a catamount, thinking he'd get killed for sure, but I stopped him about a foot from the ground and then let go. Well, the stopping and the thump

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to the ground pretty well jarred the wind out of him, but he yelled:

"I'll tell the Old Ones! You ain't supposed to platt twishers —!"

"Tell the Old Ones," I snapped, kicking on down the leafy road. "I'll be there and tell them why. And then, old smarty pants, what will be your excuse for lifting?"

And then I was ashamed. I was showing off as bad as a Kroginold — but they make me so mad!

Our last stop before school was at the Clarinades'. My heart always squeezed when I thought of the Clarinade twins. They just started school this year — two years behind the average Canyon kid. Mrs. Kroginold used to say that the two of them, Susie and Jerry, divided one brain between them before they were born. That's unkind and untrue — thoroughly a Kroginold remark — but it is true that by Canyon standards the twins were retarded. They lacked so many of the attributes of The People. Father said it might be a delayed effect of The Crossing that they would grow out of, or it might be advance notice of what our children will be like here — what is ahead for The People. It makes me shiver, wondering.

Susie and Jerry were waiting, clinging to one another's hand as they always were. They were shy and withdrawn, but both were radiant because of starting school. Jerry, who did almost all the talking for the two of them, answered our greetings with a shy "Hello."

Then Susie surprised us all by exclaiming, "We're going to school!"

"Isn't it wonderful?" I replied, gathering her cold little hand into mine. "And you're going to have the prettiest teacher we ever had."

But Susie had retired into blushing confusion and didn't say another word all the way to school.

I was worried about Jake and Derek. They were walking apart from us, whispering, looking over at us and laughing. They were cooking up some kind of mischief for Miss Carmody. And more than anything I wanted her to stay. I found right then that there *would* be years ahead of me before I became an Old One. I tried to go in to Derek and Jake to find out what was cooking, but try as I might I couldn't get past the sibilance of their snickers and the hard, flat brightness of their eyes.

We were turning off the road into the school yard when Jemmy, who should have been up at the mine long since, suddenly stepped out of the bushes in front of us, his hands behind him. He glared at Jake and Derek and then at the rest of the children.

"You kids mind your manners when you get to school," he snapped, scowling. "And you Kroginolds — just try anything funny and I'll lift you to Old Baldy and platt the twishers on you. This is one teacher we're going to keep."

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Susie and Jerry clung together in speechless terror. The Kroginolds turned red and pushed out belligerent jaws. The rest of us just stared at a Jemmy who never raised his voice and never pushed his weight around.

"I mean it, Jake and Derek. You try getting out of line and the Old Ones will find a few answers they've been looking for — especially about the belfry in Kerry Canyon."

The Kroginolds exchanged looks of dismay and the girls sucked in breaths of astonishment. One of the most rigorously enforced rules of The Group concerns showing off outside the community. If Derek and Jake *had* been involved in ringing that bell all night last Fourth of July . . . well!

"Now you kids, scoot!" Jemmy jerked his head toward the schoolhouse and the terrified twins scudded down the leaf-strewn path like a pair of bright leaves themselves, followed by the rest of the children with the Kroginolds looking sullenly back over their shoulders and muttering.

Jemmy ducked his head and scowled. "It's time they got civilized anyway. There's no sense to our losing teachers all the time."

"No," I said noncommittally.

"There's no point in scaring her to death," Jemmy was intent on the leaves he was kicking with one foot.

"No," I agreed, suppressing my smile.

Then Jemmy smiled ruefully in amusement at himself. "I should waste words with you," he said. "Here." He took his hands from behind him and thrust a bouquet of burning bright autumn leaves into my arms. "They're from you to her," he said. "Something pretty for the first day."

"Oh, Jemmy!" I cried through the scarlet and crimson and gold. "They're beautiful. You've been up on Baldy this morning."

"That's right," he said. "But she won't know where they came from." And he was gone.

I hurried to catch up with the children before they got to the door. Suddenly overcome with shyness, they were milling around the porch steps, each trying to hide behind the others.

"Oh, for goodness' sakes!" I whispered to our kids. "You ate breakfast with her this morning. She won't bite. Go on in."

But I found myself shouldered to the front and leading the subdued group into the school room. While I was giving the bouquet of leaves to Miss Carmody, the others with the ease of established habit slid into their usual seats, leaving only the twins, stricken and white, standing alone.

Miss Carmody, dropping the leaves on her desk, knelt quickly beside them, pried a hand of each gently free from their frenzied clutching and held them in hers.

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"I'm so glad you came to school," she said in her warm, rich voice. "I need a first grade to make the school work out right and I have a seat that must have been built on purpose for twins."

And she led them over to the side of the room, close enough to the old pot-bellied stove for Outside comfort later and near enough to the window to see out. There, in dusted glory, stood one of the old double desks that The Group must have inherited from some ghost town out in the hills. There were two wooden boxes for footstools for small dangling feet and, spouting like a flame from the old ink well hole, a spray of vivid red leaves — matchmates to those Jemmy had given me.

The twins slid into the desk, never loosing hands, and stared up at Miss Carmody, wide-eyed. She smiled back at them and, leaning forward, poked her finger tip into the deep dimple in each round chin.

"Buried smiles," she said, and the two scared faces lighted up briefly with wavery smiles. Then Miss Carmody turned to the rest of us.

I never did hear her introductory words. I was too busy mulling over the spray of leaves, and how she came to know the identical routine, words and all, that the twins' mother used to make them smile, and how on earth she knew about the old desks in the shed. But by the time we rose to salute the flag and sing our morning song, I had it figured out. Father must have briefed her on the way home last night. The twins were an ever present concern of the whole Group and we were all especially anxious to have their first year a successful one. Also, Father knew the smile routine and where the old desks were stored. As for the spray of leaves, well, some did grow this low on the mountain and frost is tricky at leaf-turning time.

So school was launched and went along smoothly. Miss Carmody was a good teacher and even the Kroginolds found their studies interesting.

They hadn't tried any tricks since Jemmy threatened them. That is, except that silly deal with the chalk. Miss Carmody was explaining something on the board and was groping sideways for the chalk to add to the lesson. Jake was deliberately lifting the chalk every time she almost had it. I was just ready to do something about it when Miss Carmody snapped her fingers with annoyance and grasped the chalk firmly. Jake caught my eye about then and shrank about six inches in girth and height. I didn't tell Jemmy, but Jake's fear that I might kept him straight for a long time.

The twins were really blossoming. They laughed and played with the rest of the kids and Jerry even went off occasionally with the other boys at noon time, coming back as disheveled and wet as the others after a dam-building session in the creek.

Miss Carmody fitted so well into the community and was so well-liked by us kids that it began to look like we'd finally keep a teacher all year. Al-

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ready she had withstood some of the shocks that had sent our other teachers screaming. For instance. . . .

The first time Susie got a robin redbreast sticker on her bookmark for reading a whole page — six lines — perfectly, she lifted all the way back to her seat, literally walking about four inches in the air. I held my breath until she sat down and was caressing the glossy sticker with one finger, then I sneaked a cautious look at Miss Carmody. She was sitting very erect, her hands clutching both ends of her desk as though in the act of rising, a look of incredulous surprise on her face. Then she relaxed, shook her head and smiled, and busied herself with some papers.

I let my breath out cautiously. The last teacher but two went into hysterics when one of the girls absent-mindedly lifted back to her seat because her sore foot hurt. I had hoped Miss Carmody was tougher — and apparently she was.

That same week, one noon hour, Jethro came pelting up to the school house where Valancy — that's her first name and I call her by it when we are alone, after all she's only four years older than I — was helping me with that gruesome Tests and Measurements I was taking by extension from Teachers' College.

"Hey Karen!" he yelled through the window. "Can you come out a minute?"

"Why?" I yelled back, annoyed at the interruption just when I was trying to figure what was normal about a normal grade curve.

"There's need," yelled Jethro.

I put down my book. "I'm sorry, Valancy. I'll go see what's eating him."

"Should I come too?" she asked. "If something's wrong —"

"It's probably just some silly thing," I said, edging out fast. When one of The People says "There's need," that means Group business.

"Adonday Veeah!" I muttered at Jethro as we rattled down the steep rocky path to the creek. "What are you trying to do? Get us all in trouble? What's the matter?"

"Look," said Jethro, and there were the boys standing around an alarmed but proud Jerry and above their heads, poised in the air over a half-built rock dam, was a huge boulder.

"Who lifted that?" I gasped.

"I did," volunteered Jerry, blushing crimson.

I turned on Jethro. "Well, why didn't you platt the twishers on it? You didn't have to come running —"

"On *that?*" Jethro squeaked. "You know very well we're not allowed to *lift* anything that big let alone platt it. Besides," shamefaced, "I can't remember that dern girl stuff."

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"Oh Jethro! You're so stupid sometimes!" I turned to Jerry. "How on earth did you ever lift anything that big?"

He squirmed. "I watched Daddy at the mine once."

"Does he let you lift at home?" I asked severely.

"I don't know." Jerry squashed mud with one shoe, hanging his head. "I never lifted anything before."

"Well, you know better. You kids aren't allowed to lift anything an Outsider your age can't handle alone. And not even that if you can't platt it afterwards."

"I know it," Jerry was still torn between embarrassment and pride.

"Well, remember it," I said. And taking a handful of sun, I platted the twishers and set the boulder back on the hillside where it belonged.

Platting does come easier to the girls — sunshine platting, that is. Of course only the Old Ones do the sun-and-rain one and only the very Oldest of them all would dare the moonlight-and-dark, that can move mountains. But that was still no excuse for Jethro to forget and run the risk of having Valancy see what she mustn't see.

It wasn't until I was almost back to the schoolhouse that it dawned on me. Jerry had lifted! Kids his age usually lift play stuff almost from the time they walk. That doesn't need platting because it's just a matter of a few inches and a few seconds so gravity manages the return. But Jerry and Susie never had. They were finally beginning to catch up. Maybe it *was* just the Crossing that slowed them down — and maybe only the Clarinades. In my delight, *I* forgot and lifted to the school porch without benefit of the steps. But Valancy was putting up pictures on the high, old-fashioned moulding just below the ceiling, so no harm was done. She was flushed from her efforts and asked me to bring the step stool so she could finish them. I brought it and steadied it for her — and then nearly let her fall as I stared. How had she hung those first four pictures before I got there?

The weather was unnaturally dry all Fall. We didn't mind it much because rain with an Outsider around is awfully messy. We have to let ourselves get wet. But when November came and went and Christmas was almost upon us, and there was practically no rain and no snow at all, we all began to get worried. The creek dropped to a trickle and then to scattered puddles and then went dry. Finally the Old Ones had to spend an evening at the Group Reservoir doing something about our dwindling water supply. They wanted to get rid of Valancy for the evening, just in case, so Jemmy volunteered to take her to Kerry to the show. I was still awake when they got home long after midnight. Since I began to develop the Gift, I have long periods of restlessness when it seems I have no apartness but am of every

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person in the Group. The training I should start soon will help me shut out the others except when I want them. The only thing is that we don't know who is to train me. Since Grandmother died there has been no Sorter in our Group and because of the Crossing, we have no books or records to help.

Anyway, I was awake and leaning on my window sill in the darkness. They stopped on the porch — Jemmy is bunking at the mine during his stint there. I didn't have to guess or use a Gift to read the pantomime before me. I closed my eyes and my mind as their shadows merged. Under their strong emotion, I could have had free access to their minds, but I had been watching them all Fall. I knew in a special way what passed between them, and I knew that Valancy often went to bed in tears and that Jemmy spent too many lonely hours on the Crag that juts out over the canyon from high on Old Baldy, as though he were trying to make his heart as inaccessible to Outsiders as the Crag is. I knew what he felt, but oddly enough I had never been able to sort Valancy since that first night. There was something very un-Outsiderish and also very un-Groupish about her mind and I couldn't figure what.

I heard the front door open and close and Valancy's light steps fading down the hall and then I felt Jemmy calling me outside. I put my coat on over my robe and shivered down the hall. He was waiting by the porch steps, his face still and unhappy in the faint moonlight.

"She won't have me," he said flatly.

"Oh, Jemmy!" I cried. "You asked her —"

"Yes," he said. "She said no."

"I'm so sorry." I huddled down on the top step to cover my cold ankles. "But Jemmy —"

"Yes, I know!" He retorted savagely. "She's an Outsider. I have no business even to want her. Well, if she'd have me, I wouldn't hesitate a minute. This Purity-of-the-Group deal is —"

". . . is fine and right," I said softly, "as long as it doesn't touch you personally? But think for a minute, Jemmy. Would you be able to live a life as an Outsider? Just think of the million and one restraints that you would have to impose on yourself — and for the rest of your life, too, or lose her after all. Maybe it's better to accept *No* now than to try to build something and ruin it completely later. And if there should be children . . ." I paused. "*Could* there be children, Jemmy?"

I heard him draw a sharp breath.

"We don't know," I went on. "We haven't had the occasion to find out. Do you want Valancy to be part of the first experiment?"

Jemmy slapped his hat viciously down on his thigh, then he laughed.

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"You have the Gift," he said, though I had never told him. "Have you any idea, sister mine, how little you will be liked when you become an Old One?"

"Grandmother was well-liked," I answered placidly. Then I cried, "Don't *you* set me apart, darn you, Jemmy. Isn't it enough to know that among a different people, *I* am different? Don't *you* desert me now!" I was almost in tears.

Jemmy dropped to the step beside me and thumped my shoulder in his old way. "Pull up your socks, Karen. We have to do what we have to do. I was just taking my mad out on you. What a world." He sighed heavily.

I huddled deeper in my coat, cold of soul.

"But the other one is gone," I whispered. "The Home."

And we sat there sharing the poignant sorrow that is a constant undercurrent among The People, even those of us who never actually saw The Home. Father says it's because of a sort of racial memory.

"But she didn't say no because she doesn't love me," Jemmy went on at last. "She does love me. She told me so."

"Then why not?" Sister-wise I couldn't imagine anyone turning Jemmy down.

Jemmy laughed — a short, unhappy laugh. "Because she is different."

"*She's* different?"

"That's what she said, as though it was pulled out of her. 'I can't marry,' she said. 'I'm different!' That's pretty good, isn't it, coming from an Outsider!"

"She doesn't know we're The People," I said. "She must feel that she is different from everyone. I wonder why?"

"I don't know. There's something about her, though. A kind of shield or wall that keeps us apart. I've never met anything like it in an Outsider or in one of The People either. Sometimes it's like meshing with one of us and then *bang!* I smash the daylights out of me against that stone wall."

"Yes, I know," I said. "I've felt it, too."

We listened to the silent past-midnight world and then Jemmy stood.

"Well, g'night, Karen. Be seeing you."

I stood up, too. "Good night, Jemmy." I watched him start off in the late moonlight. He turned at the gate, his face hidden in the shadows.

"But I'm not giving up," he said quietly. "Valancy is my love."

The next day was hushed and warm — unnaturally so for December in our hills. There was a kind of ominous stillness among the trees, and, threading thinly against the milky sky, the thin smokes of little brush fires

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pointed out the dryness of the whole country. If you looked closely you could see piling behind Old Baldy an odd bank of clouds, so nearly the color of the sky that it was hardly discernable, but puffy and summer-thunderheady.

All of us were restless in school, the kids reacting to the weather, Valancy pale and unhappy after last night. I was bruising my mind against the blank wall in hers, trying to find some way I could help her.

Finally the thousand and one little annoyances were climaxed by Jerry and Susie scuffling until Susie was pushed out of the desk onto an open box of wet water colors that Debra for heaven only knows what reason had left on the floor by her desk. Susie shrieked and Debra sputtered and Jerry started a high silly giggle of embarrassment and delight. Valancy, without looking, reached for something to rap for order with and knocked down the old cracked vase full of drooping wildflowers and three-day-old water. The vase broke and flooded her desk with the foul-smelling deluge, ruining the monthly report she had almost ready to send in to the County School Superintendent.

For a stricken moment there wasn't a sound in the room, then Valancy burst into half-hysterical laughter and the whole room rocked with her. We all rallied around doing what we could to clean up Susie and Valancy's desk and then Valancy declared a holiday and decided that it would be the perfect time to go up-canyon to the slopes of Baldy and gather what greenery we could find to decorate our school room for the holidays.

We all take our lunches to school, so we gathered them up and took along a square tarp the boys had brought to help build the dam in the creek. Now that the creek was dry, they couldn't use it and it'd come in handy to sit on at lunch time and would serve to carry our greenery home in, too, stretcher-fashion.

Released from the school room, we were all loud and jubilant and I nearly kinked my neck trying to keep all the kids in sight at once to nip in the bud any thoughtless lifting or other Group activity. The kids were all so wild, they might forget.

We went on up-canyon past the kids' dam and climbed the bare, dry waterfalls that stair-step up to the Mesa. On the Mesa, we spread the tarp and pooled our lunches to make it more picnicky. A sudden hush from across the tarp caught my attention. Debra, Rachel and Lizbeth were staring horrified at Susie's lunch. She was calmly dumping out a half dozen *koomatka* beside her sandwiches.

Koomatka are almost the only plants that lasted through the Crossing. I think four *koomatka* survived in someone's personal effects. They were planted and cared for as tenderly as babies and now every household in the

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Group has a *koomatka* plant growing in some quiet spot out of casual sight. Their fruit is eaten not so much for nourishment as Earth knows nourishment, but as a last remembrance of all other similar delights that died with The Home. We always save *Koomatka* for special occasions. Susie must have sneaked some out when her mother wasn't looking. And there they were — across the table from an Outsider!

Before I could snap them to me or say anything, Valancy turned, too, and caught sight of the softly glowing bluey-green pile. Her eyes widened and one hand went out. She started to say something and then she dropped her eyes quickly and drew her hand back. She clasped her hands tightly together and the girls, eyes intent on her, scrambled the *koomatka* back into the sack and Lizbeth silently comforted Susie who had just realized what she had done. She was on the verge of tears at having betrayed The People to an Outsider.

Just then 'Kiah and Derek rolled across the picnic table fighting over a cupcake. By the time we salvaged our lunch from under them and they had scraped the last of the chocolate frosting off their T-shirts, the *koomatka* incident seemed closed. And yet, as we lay back resting a little to settle our stomachs, staring up at the smothery low-hanging clouds that had grown from the milky morning sky, I suddenly found myself trying to decide about Valancy's look when she saw the fruit. Surely it couldn't have been recognition!

At the end of our brief siesta, we carefully buried the remains of our lunch — the hill was much too dry to think of burning it — and started on again. After a while, the slope got steeper and the stubborn tangle of manzanita tore at our clothes and scratched our legs and grabbed at the rolled-up tarp until we all looked longingly at the free air above it. If Valancy hadn't been with us we could have lifted over the worst and saved all this trouble. But we blew and panted for a while and then struggled on.

After an hour or so, we worked out onto a rocky knoll that leaned against the slope of Baldy and made a tiny island in the sea of manzanita. We all stretched out gratefully on the crumbling granite outcropping, listening to our heart-beats slowing.

Then Jethro sat up and sniffed. Valancy and I alerted. A sudden puff of wind from the little side canyon brought the acrid pungency of burning brush to us. Jethro scrambled along the narrow ridge to the slope of Baldy and worked his way around out of sight into the canyon. He came scrambling back, half lifting, half running.

"Awful!" he panted. "It's awful! The whole canyon ahead is on fire and it's coming this way fast!"

Valancy gathered us together with a glance.

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"Why didn't we see the smoke?" she asked tensely. "There wasn't any smoke when we left the schoolhouse."

"Can't see this slope from school," he said. "Fire could burn over a dozen slopes and we'd hardly see the smoke. This side of Baldy is a rim fencing in an awful mess of canyons."

"What'll we do?" quavered Lizbeth, hugging Susie to her.

Another gust of wind and smoke set us all to coughing and through my streaming tears, I saw a long lapping tongue of fire reach around the canyon wall.

Valancy and I looked at each other. I couldn't sort her mind, but mine was a panic, beating itself against the fire and then against the terrible tangle of manzanita all around us. Bruising against the possibility of lifting out of danger, then against the fact that none of the kids was capable of sustained progressive self-lifting for more than a minute or so and how could we leave Valancy? I hid my face in my hands to shut out the acres and acres of tinder-dry manzanita that would blaze like a torch at the first touch of fire. If only it would rain! You can't *set* fire to wet manzanita, but after these long months of drought — !

I heard the younger children scream and looked up to see Valancy staring at me with an intensity that frightened me even as I saw fire standing bright and terrible behind her at the mouth of the canyon.

Jake, yelling hoarsely, broke from the group and lifted a yard or two over the manzanita before he tangled his feet and fell helpless into the ugly, angled branches.

"Get under the tarp!" Valancy's voice was a whip-lash. "All of you get under the tarp!"

"It won't do any good," bellowed 'Kiah. "It'll burn like paper!"

"Get — under — the — tarp!" Valancy's spaced, icy words drove us to unfolding the tarp and spreading it to creep under. I lifted (hoping even at this awful moment that Valancy wouldn't see me) over to Jake and yanked him back to his feet. I couldn't lift with him so I pushed and prodded and half-carried him back through the heavy surge of black smoke to the tarp and shoved him under. Valancy was standing, back to the fire, so changed and alien that I shut my eyes against her and started to crawl in with the other kids.

And then she began to speak. The rolling, terrible thunder of her voice shook my bones and I swallowed a scream. A surge of fear swept through our huddled group and shoved me back out from under the tarp.

Till I die, I'll never forget Valancy standing there tense and taller than life against the rolling convulsive clouds of smoke, both her hands outstretched, fingers wide apart as the measured terror of her voice went on

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and on in words that plague me because I should have known them and didn't. As I watched, I felt an icy cold gather, a paralyzing, unearthly cold that froze the tears on my tensely upturned face.

And then lightning leaped from finger to finger of her lifted hands. And lightning answered in the clouds above her. With a toss of her hands she threw the cold, the lightning, the sullen shifting smoke upward, and the roar of the racing fire was drowned in a hissing roar of down-drenching rain.

I knelt there in the deluge, looking for an eternal second into her drained, despairing, hopeless eyes before I caught her just in time to keep her head from banging on the granite as she pitched forward, inert.

Then as I sat there cradling her head in my lap, shaking with cold and fear, with the terrified wailing of the kids behind me, I heard Father shout and saw him and Jemmy and Darcy Clarinade in the old pick-up, lifting over the steaming streaming manzanita, over the trackless mountain side through the rain to us. Father lowered the truck until one of the wheels brushed a branch and spun lazily, then the three of them lifted all of us up to the dear familiarity of that beat-up old jalopy.

Jemmy received Valancy's limp body into his arms and crouched in back, huddling her in his arms, for the moment hostile to the whole world that had brought his love to such a pass.

We kids clung to Father in an ecstasy of relief. He hugged us all tight to him, then he raised my face.

"Why did it rain?" he asked sternly, every inch an Old One while the cold downpour dripped off the ends of my hair and he stood dry inside his Shield.

"I don't know," I sobbed, blinking my streaming eyes against his sternness. "Valancy did it . . . with lightning . . . it was cold . . . she talked. . . ." Then I broke down completely, plumping down on the rough floor boards and, in spite of my age, howling right along with the other kids.

It was a silent, solemn group that gathered in the schoolhouse that evening. I sat at my desk with my hands folded stiffly in front of me, half scared of my own People. This was the first official meeting of the Old Ones I'd ever attended. They all sat in desks, too, except the Oldest who sat in Valancy's chair. Valancy sat stony-faced in the twin's desk, but her nervous fingers shredded one kleenex after another as she waited.

The Oldest rapped the side of the desk with his cane and turned his sightless eyes from one to another of us.

"We're all here," he said, "to inquire ——"

"Oh, stop it!" Valancy jumped up from her seat. "Can't you fire me

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without all this rigmarole? I'm used to it. Just say go and I'll go!" She stood trembling.

"Sit down, Miss Carmody," said the Oldest. And Valancy sat down meekly.

"Where were you born?" asked the Oldest quietly.

"What does it matter?" flared Valancy. Then resignedly, "It's in my application. Vista Mar, California."

"And your parents?"

"I don't know."

There was a stir in the room.

"Why not?"

"Oh, this is so unnecessary!" cried Valancy. "But if you *have* to know, both my parents were foundlings. They were found wandering in the streets after a big explosion and fire in Vista Mar. An old couple who lost everything in the fire took them in. When they grew up, they married. I was born. They died. Can I go now?"

A murmur swept the room.

"Why did you leave your other jobs?" asked Father.

Before Valancy could answer, the door was flung open and Jemmy stalked defiantly in.

"Go!" said the Oldest.

"Please," said Jemmy, deflating suddenly. "Let me stay. It concerns me too."

The Oldest fingered his cane and then nodded. Jemmy half-smiled with relief and sat down in a back seat.

"Go on," said the Oldest One to Valancy.

"All right then," said Valancy. "I lost my first job because I — well — I guess you'd call it levitated — to fix a broken blind in my room. It was stuck and I just . . .went up . . . in the air until I unstuck it. The principal saw me. He couldn't believe it and it scared him so he fired me." She paused expectantly.

The Old Ones looked at one another and my silly, confused mind began to add up columns that only my lack of common sense had kept from giving totals long ago.

"And the other one?" The Oldest leaned his cheek on his doubled-up hand as he bent forward.

Valency was taken aback and she flushed in confusion.

"Well," she said hesitantly, "I called my books to me — I mean they were on my desk. . . ."

"We know what you mean," said The Oldest.

"You know!" Valancy looked dazed.

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The Oldest stood up.

"*Valancy Carmody, open your mind!*"

Valancy stared at him and then burst into tears.

"I can't, I can't," she sobbed. "It's been too long. I can't let anyone in. I'm different. I'm alone. Can't you understand? They all died. I'm alien!"

"You are alien no longer," said the Oldest. "You are home now, Valancy." He motioned to me. "Karen, go in to her."

So I did. At first the wall was still there; then with a soundless cry, half anguish and half joy, the wall went down and I was with Valancy. I saw all the secrets that had cankered in her since her parents died — the parents who were of The People.

They had been reared by the old couple who were not only of The People but had been The Oldest of the whole Crossing.

I tasted with her the hidden frightening things — the need for living as an Outsider, the terrible need for concealing all her differences and suppressing all the extra Gifts of The People, the ever present fear of betraying herself and the awful lostness that came when she thought she was the last of The People.

And then suddenly *she* came in to *me* and my mind was flooded with a far greater presence than I had ever before experienced.

My eyes flew open and I saw all of the Old Ones staring at Valancy. Even the Oldest had his face turned to her, wonder written as widely on his scarred face as on the others.

He bowed his head and made The Sign. "The lost persuasions and designs," he murmured. "She has them all."

And then I knew that Valancy, Valancy who had wrapped herself so tightly against the world to which any thoughtless act might betray her that she had lived with us all this time without our knowing about her or she about us, was one of us. Not only one of us but such a one as had not been since Grandmother died — and even beyond that. My incoherent thoughts cleared to one.

Now I would have some one to train me. Now I could become a sorter — but only second to her.

I turned to share my wonder with Jemmy. He was looking at Valancy as The People must have looked at The Home in the last hour. Then he turned to the door.

Before I could draw a breath, Valancy was gone from me and from the Old Ones and Jemmy was turning to her outstretched hands.

Then I bolted for the outdoors and rushed like one possessed down the lane, lifting and running until I staggered up our porch steps and collapsed against Mother, who had heard me coming.

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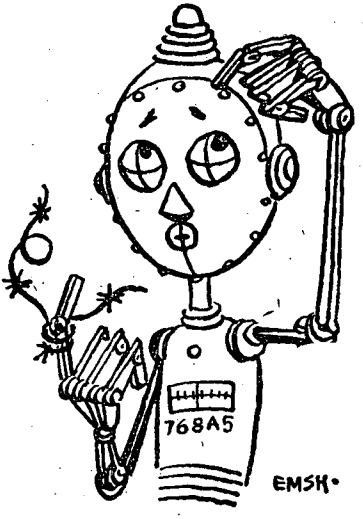
"Oh, Mother!" I cried. "She's one of us! She's Jemmy's love! She's wonderful!" And I burst into noisy sobs in the warm comfort of Mother's arms.

So now I don't have to go Outside to become a teacher. We have a permanent one. But I'm going anyway. I want to be as much like Valancy as I can and she has her degree. Besides I can use the discipline of living Outside for a year.

I have so much to learn and so much training to go through, but Valancy will always be there with me. I won't be set apart alone because of The Gift.

Maybe I shouldn't mention it, but one reason I want to hurry my training is that we're going to try to locate the other People. None of the boys here please me.



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Unlike so many science fiction writers who began selling stories long before they were eligible to vote, Jack Finney did not publish his first story until he was 35. That Finney first took a Special Prize in the second annual contest of "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine," and in the five years since then Finney has established himself as one of the top purveyors of short fiction to the slicks, especially "Collier's." Slick is often used superficially as a term of critical contempt (not unmixed with financial envy); but in its best sense it is the perfect term for the admirably adroit smoothness of Mr. Finney's stories — many of which, fortunately, fall into the category of imaginative fiction. That this polished slickness need not interfere with literary quality is evidenced by the fact that the following account of wish-fulfilling time travel was honored by Martha Foley in her 1950 list of distinctive American short stories.

The Third Level

by JACK FINNEY

THE presidents of the New York Central and the New York, New Haven and Hartford railroads will swear on a stack of timetables that there are only two. But I say there are three, because I've *been* on the third level at Grand Central Station. Yes, I've taken the obvious step: I talked to a psychiatrist friend of mine, among others. I told him about the third level at Grand Central Station, and he said it was a waking-dream wish fulfillment. He said I was unhappy. That made my wife kind of mad, but he explained that he meant the modern world is full of insecurity, fear, war, worry and all the rest of it, and that I just want to escape. Well, hell, who doesn't? Everybody I know wants to escape, but they don't wander down into any third level at Grand Central Station.

But that's the reason, he said, and my friends all agreed. Everything points to it, they claimed. My stamp collecting, for example; that's a "temporary refuge from reality." Well, maybe, but my grandfather didn't need any refuge from reality; things were pretty nice and peaceful in his

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day, from all I hear, and he started my collection. It's a nice collection, too, blocks of four of practically every U.S. issue, first-day covers, and so on. President Roosevelt collected stamps, too, you know.

Anyway, here's what happened at Grand Central. One night last summer I worked late at the office. I was in a hurry to get uptown to my apartment so I decided to subway from Grand Central because it's faster than the bus.

Now, I don't know why this should have happened to me. I'm just an ordinary guy named Charley, 31 years old, and I was wearing a tan gabardine suit and a straw hat with a fancy band; I passed a dozen men who looked just like me. And I wasn't trying to escape from anything; I just wanted to get home to Louisa, my wife.

I turned into Grand Central from Vanderbilt Avenue, and went down the steps to the first level, where you take trains like the Twentieth Century. Then I walked down another flight to the second level, where the suburban trains leave from, ducked into an arched doorway heading for the subway — and got lost. That's easy to do. I've been in and out of Grand Central hundreds of times, but I'm always bumping into new doorways and stairs and corridors. Once I got into a tunnel about a mile long and came out in the lobby of the Roosevelt Hotel. Another time I came up in an office building on Forty-sixth Street, three blocks away.

Sometimes I think Grand Central is growing like a tree, pushing out new corridors and staircases like roots. There's probably a long tunnel that nobody knows about feeling its way under the city right now, on its way to Times Square, and maybe another to Central Park. And maybe — because for so many people through the years Grand Central *has* been an exit, a way of escape — maybe that's how the tunnel I got into . . . But I never told my psychiatrist friend about that idea.

The corridor I was in began angling left and slanting downward and I thought that was wrong, but I kept on walking. All I could hear was the empty sound of my own footsteps and I didn't pass a soul. Then I heard that sort of hollow roar ahead that means open space and people talking. The tunnel turned sharp left; I went down a short flight of stairs and came out on the third level at Grand Central Station. For just a moment I thought I was back on the second level, but I saw the room was smaller, there were fewer ticket windows and train gates, and the information booth in the center was wood and old-looking. And the man in the booth wore a green eyeshade and long black sleeve protectors. The lights were dim and sort of flickering. Then I saw why; they were open-flame gaslights.

There were brass spittoons on the floor, and across the station a glint of light caught my eye; a man was pulling a gold watch from his vest pocket. He snapped open the cover, glanced at his watch, and frowned. He wore a

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dirty hat, a black four-button suit with tiny lapels, and he had a big, black, handle-bar mustache. Then I looked around and saw that everyone in the station was dressed like 1890 something; I never saw so many beards, sideburns and fancy mustaches in my life. A woman walked in through the train gate; she wore a dress with leg-of-mutton sleeves and skirts to the top of her high-buttoned shoes. Back of her, out on the tracks, I caught a glimpse of a locomotive, a very small Currier & Ives locomotive with a funnel-shaped stack. And then I knew.

To make sure, I walked over to a newsboy and glanced at the stack of papers at his feet. It was the *World;* and the *World* hasn't been published for years. The lead story said something about President Cleveland. I've found that front page since, in the Public Library files, and it was printed June 11, 1894.

I turned toward the ticket windows knowing that here — on the third level at Grand Central — I could buy tickets that would take Louisa and me anywhere in the United States we wanted to go. In the year 1894. And I wanted two tickets to Galesburg, Illinois.

Have you ever been there? It's a wonderful town still, with big old frame houses, huge lawns, and tremendous trees whose branches meet overhead and roof the streets. And in 1894, summer evenings were twice as long, and people sat out on their lawns, the men smoking cigars and talking quietly, the women waving palm-leaf fans, with the fireflies all around, in a peaceful world. To be back there with the first World War still twenty years off, and World War II over 40 years in the future . . . I wanted two tickets for that.

The clerk figured the fare — he glanced at my fancy hatband, but he figured the fare — and I had enough for two coach tickets, one way. But when I counted out the money and looked up, the clerk was staring at me. He nodded at the bills. "That ain't money, mister," he said, "and if you're trying to skin me you won't get very far," and he glanced at the cash drawer beside him. Of course the money was old-style bills, half again as big as the money we use nowadays, and different-looking. I turned away and got out fast. There's nothing nice about jail, even in 1894.

And that was that. I left the same way I came, I suppose. Next day, during lunch hour, I drew $300 out of the bank, nearly all we had, and bought old-style currency (that *really* worried my psychiatrist friend). You can buy old money at almost any coin dealer's, but you have to pay a premium. My $300 bought less than $200 in old-style bills, but I didn't care; eggs were thirteen cents a dozen in 1894.

But I've never again found the corridor that leads to the third level at Grand Central Station, although I've tried often enough.

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Louisa was pretty worried when I told her all this, and didn't want me to look for the third level any more, and after a while I stopped; I went back to my stamps. But now we're *both* looking, every week end, because now we have proof that the third level is still there. My friend Sam Weiner disappeared! Nobody knew where, but I sort of suspected because Sam's a city boy, and I used to tell him about Galesburg — I went to school there — and he always said he liked the sound of the place. And that's where he is, all right. In 1894.

Because one night, fussing with my stamp collection, I found — Well, do you know what a first-day cover is? When a new stamp is issued, stamp collectors buy some and use them to mail envelopes to themselves on the very first day of sale; and the postmark proves the date. The envelope is called a first-day cover. They're never opened; you just put blank paper in the envelope.

That night, among my oldest first-day covers, I found one that shouldn't have been there. But there it was. It was there because someone had mailed it to my grandfather at his home in Galesburg; that's what the address on the envelope said. And it had been there since July 18, 1894 — the postmark showed that — yet I didn't remember it at all. The stamp was a six-cent, dull brown, with a picture of President Garfield. Naturally, when the envelope came to Granddad in the mail, it went right into his collection and stayed there — till I took it out and opened it.

The paper inside wasn't blank. It read:

941 Willard Street
Galesburg, Illinois
July 18, 1894

Charley:

I got to wishing that you were right. Then I got to *believing* you were right. And, Charley, it's true; I found the third level! I've been here two weeks, and right now, down the street at the Dalys', someone is playing a piano, and they're all out on the front porch singing Seeing Nellie Home. And I'm invited over for lemonade. Come on back, Charley and Louisa. Keep looking till you find the third level! It's worth it, believe me!

The note is signed Sam.

At the stamp and coin store I go to, I found out that Sam bought $800 worth of old-style currency. That ought to set him up in a nice little hay, feed and grain business; he always said that's what he really wished he could do, and he certainly can't go back to his old business. Not in Galesburg, Illinois, in 1894. His old business? Why, Sam was my psychiatrist.

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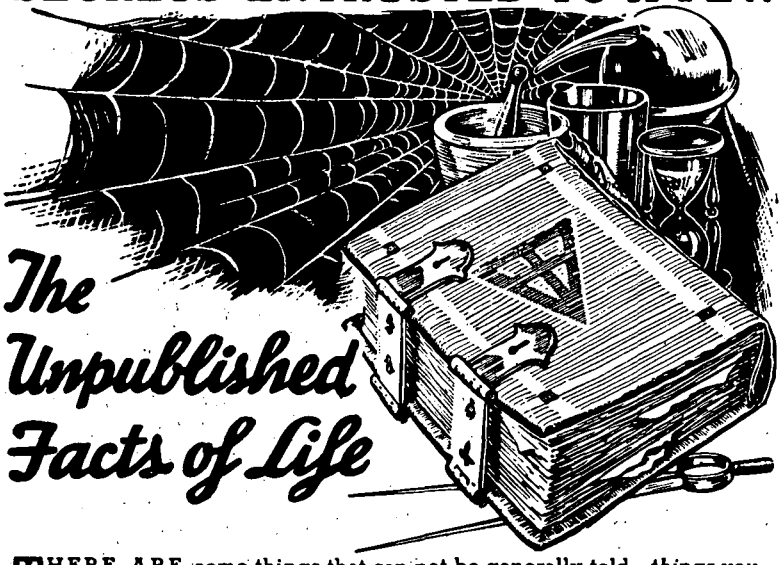

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